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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

TEACHERS' SELECTION OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE FOR JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS: A PERSPECTIVE ON LITERATURE SELECTION AND USE IN THE CLASSROOM

by

INGRID JOHNSTON ©

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION

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SUBMITTED BY: INGRID JOHNSTON

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore how junior high language arts teachers in Alberta select novels for their students' classroom reading and encourage students' responses to the literature. I hoped to discover which resources teachers were using to make literary selections and to gain insight into the reading context teachers established for students in the classroom.

Eighteen junior high language arts teachers from six school boards were interviewed during a four week period. The audiotaped interviews were semi-structured, guided by a number of predetermined questions which encouraged teachers to reflect on their criteria for novel selection. I categorized three modes of approach to literature teaching in junior high school: whole class novel studies, small group reading and individualized reading programs, and asked teachers to provide information on their teaching strategies within this framework. The interview data were augmented by relevant documentation of novel selections, unit plans and evaluation criteria.

Eight themes relating to novel selection and teachers' concerns about their students' reading interests and abilities emerged from the data. Most teachers in the study selected literature which they believed students could enjoy reading and which could also help students become discriminating readers and deepen their literary appreciation. Some teachers felt constrained in their novel selection by availability of

books in their school, their own familiarity with young adult literature and their desire to choose novels from authorized lists.

Opinions varied on the best way to organize a literature program for junior high students. Some teachers favoured whole class novel studies; other teachers organized small group reading with a variety of novels; and several teachers had restructured their program into an Atwell-type reading workshop, allowing students more personal novel choices. Teachers encouraged students' responses to literature through a variety of individual and communal oral and written activities. Most participants incorporated a form of individualized reading into their program, emphasizing the need to address students' different abilities and interests by offering them choices of books to read and providing in-class reading time.

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CHAPTER ONE

ON TEACHING LITERATURE

LITERATURE AND LIFE

> Literature is clearly literate *activity* that can bring everyone a fuller enjoyment of life, beyond usefulness, beyond, even, the worthy notion that it is nourishment that makes us grow. It is its own kind of deep play. For all that the books I have called literature at various stages of my growing old have joined me to the history and language of my forebears in ways that plumb my very depths, and taught me who I am, for all that they have added wondrously, immeasurably to my understanding of humankind, myself and the world, I think of them as something I have *enjoyed*, in the richest sense. (Margaret Meek, 1991, p. 182)

Junior high language arts teachers are constantly reminded of the complexity of the reading process by their students' varying experiences with literature and responses to novels in their language arts classrooms. Protherough (1983) suggests that a key question for teachers could be framed like this: "When a novel is being 'taught', what is being 'learned'?" Implicit in this question are others: What principles do we use to select novels that we put into our students' hands? How do the activities we practise help students to read with more enjoyment and understanding?

As an English teacher, I think it is vital to encourage students' interest and enjoyment in reading. We value literature because of its ability to "re-create the texture of human experience" through a "unique relationship with language and form" (Chambers, 1973, p.4). Literature enhances our personal development by providing new insights into human nature and enlarging our vision and understanding of life; it allows us to extend our sensual and imaginative perception of human experience. Its basic concern is with human values and the commonality of human aspirations and experiences; it reminds us of John Donne's admonition that no-one is "an island, entire of itself." Reading literature enables us to engage imaginatively and emotionally in a communication with the inner realities of others, thereby extending the quality and range of our ability to make choices in life.

Students at the junior high school level are particularly curious about the world and their place in it. They are seeking self-knowledge and determining their place in society by questioning social values, pondering the meaning of life and considering varying possibilities of human relationships. In adolescence, maybe more than at any other time, literature, particularly narrative fiction, can take readers to the limits of their human experience and imaginatively extend it.

Margaret Meek (1982) believes that reading in adolescence is vitally important because the habits laid down at that time seem to last a lifetime. She cautions that students may be put off reading for life at this stage if the conflict between the books they 'have to read' and the books they 'want to read' becomes too acute (p. 201). We can never be sure exactly why students avoid reading. Meek suggests that the answer lies partly in the narrow range of books we have traditionally offered students in school and partly in our implicit denial that reading can be fun.

LITERATURE AND SCHOOL

> Literature courses conceived as repositories of the great works are likely to be more like a walk through a graveyard than an encounter with the minds of great writers and thinkers.
> (Robert Probst, 1988, p.205)

For teachers of English, personal engagement with literature has generally been positive. Many teachers come into the profession because of love of literature and interest in sharing literary experiences with students. Unfortunately, though our literary experiences may be fruitful, those of many school graduates are not. Our schools have aimed at helping students love literature, read and respond to it skilfully and become familiar with the great ideas and values of civilization, but too many students leave school hating books and viewing literature as divorced from their lives and interests.

Tchudi and Mitchell (1988) suggest that literature programs have consistently ignored the individual experiences and interests that young people bring to their reading. An emphasis on literary surveys, reading by genre or types and mastery of critical terminology, common in college literature classes, has also been the norm in many high school and even many junior high school classes. The texts chosen for this focus on analysis and explication are usually those within the accepted canon of classical literature, many of which "speak to students in faint voices and unfamiliar languages" (p.112).

Applebee (1974) identifies the same prevailing problem with English teaching when he claims that literature teachers "have never successfully resisted the pressure to formulate their subject as a body of knowledge to be imparted" (p. 245). Probst cautions that unless students see literary classics as "exchanges with another mind about significant issues, the great works will be little more than great burdens" (1988, p. 205). He argues for a balance between control and freedom in setting up a literature class for junior high students. The teacher, drawing on expert knowledge of literature, decides on some of the works to be considered, but also responds to students' interests by incorporating adolescent literature into the curriculum. If our purpose is to structure a dialogue about important ideas, we need to consider texts that appeal to students as well as have literary merits and significance (p. 213).

Nancie Atwell (1987) elaborates on her personal acknowledgement of the need to review her literature teaching:

> Until two years ago ...I played the lit crit game... literature was something I did to students: pass out class sets of the anthology or novel, introduce vocabulary, lecture, assign, test, spoonfeed, forcefeed. I made all the choices, took all the responsibility, and found all the meanings. (p.19)

When she decided to match her own reading process against the reading process she enforced in her classroom, she found many discrepancies:

> I usually decide what I'll read, but my students seldom decided for themselves. And when my reading isn't up to me...I at least decide *how* I'll read. My students never decided. They read at the pace I set, often fragmented bits and pieces of text at a time, looking for the answers I wanted to the questions I posed.
>
> I read a lot and have routines - times I count on being able to read...too many of my students seldom read...and I did nothing to encourage or accommodate the habit of reading for pleasure.
>
> I talk about books, authors, reading and writing as a natural extension of my life as a reader. My students had little opportunity - and, I assumed, less inclination - for congenial talk about literature. (p.20)

The reading workshop she established in her classroom allowed her to learn new lessons about teaching literature from her junior high students: that the ability to read for pleasure and personal meaning can develop if students are given freedom to choose books themselves, time to read them and opportunity to talk about their books with each other and the teacher. (p.21)

YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

> For everything its season, and for every
> activity under heaven its time.
> (Ecclesiastes Chap. 3)

The growth of young adult literature in the past three decades may help to provide answers to a disparity between the teacher's view of literature and the views of junior high students by providing the literary richness and variety of reading that teachers desire for their students. The range of quality of this literature parallels that of other genres: some of the best authors of young adult books write with skill and grace and employ vivid imagery in their creation of engrossing stories with characters of depth and universality. Many novels deal with issues students can respond to immediately, have characters teenagers can easily envision or identify with and are written in language that does not create a barrier between the young reader and the text. Many of the books have themes of young people looking for direction in their lives, a search for identity in the transition from adolescence to maturity and the individual's relationship to problems in society of social injustice, prejudice, economic deprivation or political tyranny (Carlsen, 1973).

In a literary sense, young adult literature has its roots in Huckleberry Finn. Mark Twain's novel, written in 1884, with the young Huck as its sole narrator, established adolescent initiation as a major theme in American fiction

(Egoff, 1990). J.D. Salinger's novel, The Catcher in the Rye, written in 1951, created the youthful hero, Holden Caulfield, as the symbol of teenage rebellion and search for identity. Writers who followed Salinger in the sixties and beyond have explored themes of alienation and quests for independence and identity with depth and honesty, offering their readers insights into life and human nature. Not all young adult literature meets these standards: the trend towards formula fiction in books for teens has produced numbers of books of very limited literary value, with predictable plots, stereotyped characters and simplistic style. The best works of adolescent fiction stand up to "objective scrutiny according to age-old literary standards, while the poor ones do not" (Egoff, 1981). Novels such as Ursula LeGuin's Very Far Away From Anywhere Else, Janet Lunn's Shadow in Hawthorn Bay, and Phillippa Pearce's Tom's Midnight Garden have emotional and intellectual depth and clarity of thought and language that set them firmly in the realm of good literature.

C.S. Lewis discusses the vexing question of quality in children's and young adult books. He distinguishes between writing a children's book which is aimed at a particular audience, in essence writing for a targeted market, or writing a children's story because that is the "best art-form for something you have to say" (Lewis, 1980. p. 33). This distinction applies equally to young adult books. There are numerous fine, imaginative adolescent novels with a universality and permanence. What distinguishes adolescent literature is not quality but viewpoint (Engdahl, 1975). Most employ first-person narrators or have events sifted through the feelings of the youthful protagonists. They need not lack profundity but generally have less complexity in interrelationships and ideas than some adult books.

Benton and Fox (1985) suggest it is crucial for us as teachers to keep our judgements about quality and suitability of literature under constant review. When deciding on a new book to introduce to our students, we should reflect on whether it is well-written, appropriate and of interest to our students; no one book will be of interest to all our students, so a choice of titles will encourage a wider enthusiasm.

The best literature, like all great art, does more than delight us; it provides wisdom and spiritual vision. Yet enjoyment is an essential prerequisite. If we insist on offering our students only classics, which present all but the most accomplished readers with mature concepts and emotions beyond their understanding, we may perpetuate their dislike for reading. Probst (1988) reminds us that "literature is not the private domain of an intellectual elite; it is instead the reservoir of all mankind's concerns" (p. 7).

READER-RESPONSE THEORY

> No one else can read a literary work for us. The benefits of literature can emerge only from creative activity on the part of the reader himself.
> (Louise Rosenblatt, 1938)

How we choose literature for students in the classroom and how we teach it reflects our views of both the reading process and of our role as teachers. English teachers since the time of Plato and Aristotle have believed that literature has the power to affect peoples' lives positively or negatively. Censors have focused on the negative effects of literature to influence young people's moral development. English teachers traditionally assumed the educative power of literature was inherent in the text itself and that their role was to expose students to a literary canon, so that the insights, creative and intellectual efforts embodied in the text might somehow rub off. (Daigon, 1973) The work of Louise Rosenblatt (1938, 1978) and reader-response researchers has helped us to move away from such a simplistic view of the effect of literature on readers.

The reader-response based method of teaching literature is a fundamental shift from the viewpoint that literary interpretation is a correct-incorrect phenomenon to a view in which literary interpretation is perceived as a transaction between reader and text, described by Rosenblatt as "a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (1982). The powerful and lasting effects of New Critical literary theory dominated teaching and learning theory for much of the twentieth century. Meaning was believed to reside solely in the text and teachers felt students needed to be taught a great deal about literature before they could appropriately interpret a text. (Flood and Lapp, 1988)

Before the current interest in reader-response, psychologists and educational researchers were studying reading and readers. Their interests were in finding more effective ways to teach literature to students and to develop reading "skills." Their research questions were the same as those still being asked by researchers in response to literature: What happens when someone reads a literary text? What is the role of the reader compared to that of the text? How can responses be interpreted? (Cooper, 1985) Reader-response methodology has its roots in the work of I.A. Richards (1929) who bridged the gap between New Criticism philosophy and reader-response theory by arguing "there are two ways of interpreting all but a few utterances" (p. 4). He believed reader response was an individualistic, unique and idiosyncratic process in which readers were allowed to interpret in various ways provided they adhered to principles of logical thought.

Louise Rosenblatt's Literature as Exploration (1938) began a shift in emphasis from the text to the reader. Her work provided the theoretical foundations for a number of studies of response and teaching methods which attempted to describe the content of spoken or written responses of individuals and groups. A major study by James Squire (1964) explored the responses of 52 adolescents while reading four short stories to determine the nature of their responses. His findings and those of later studies by Purves and Rippere (1968) and Applebee (1978) suggest that individuals respond to literature in unique and selective ways, affected by factors of age, ability level, gender and type of text read.

In their summary of research into response to literature in 1972, Purves and Beach claimed that studies tended to support the transactional theory of Rosenblatt and showed that response is a complex process consisting of a number of interrelated parts involving understanding, psychological readiness to enter into the world of the text, and the ability to articulate personal and evaluative criteria. A review of research in English teaching by Dwight Burton (1973) emphasized the "abiding uneasiness with quantitative methods and perhaps with the empirical approach generally" in the "humanistic-oriented English teaching profession" (p. 160). Educational researchers at this time were considering new approaches in studies of response to literature and related fields, using anthropological research models to take a closer look at what occurred in English classrooms through participant observation and interviews. Whereas much recent experimental research had failed to affect teaching and classroom practice, descriptive, qualitative and naturalistic approaches were readily interpretable by teachers and viewed as more relevant to teaching practice.

Researchers of response to literature began to realize how students' responses are affected both by the context of the classroom and teacher and by individual cultural backgrounds. They saw the advantages of ethnographic inquiry with its narrative descriptions providing an authentic verbal picture of the students and their contexts. Implicit in naturalistic inquiry is an alternate world view which assumes that there are no variables, that all aspects of the context of a situation, including the researcher, are an integral part of the process and phenomena it is attempting to explain. The notion that the researcher's subjective judgements are essential to the research enterprise was particularly valued by literary theorists such as David Bleich, Louise Rosenblatt and D.W. Harding who believe that "response is a word that reminds the teacher that the experience of art is a thing of our own making, an activity in which we are our own interpretive artist" (Harding in Kantor, Kirby & Goetz, 1981). English teachers were also beginning to realize that there are a multiplicity of ways to respond to a work of literature.

READING RESEARCH AND RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

> Reading cannot be understood without consideration of perceptual, cognitive, linguistic, and social factors, not just in reading but in thinking and learning in general. (Frank Smith, 1988, p.ix)

Ethnography's connection with the philosophical perspectives of phenomenology related it to studies of reading in the late seventies which emphasized the context of discourse and related psycholinguistic processes: these studies of reading and response looked at ways in which individuals constructed their own reality and how these meanings were shared with others. Studies such as Lee Galda's (1982) which examined the oral literary responses of three grade five girls as they discussed two novels, suggest that developmental abilities are related to a spectator stance to literature, in which the reader is freed of the demands and constraints of action and able to savour feelings, contemplate forms and evaluate broadly. (Britton, 1970) These studies showed the need for further research into the nature of the development of literary response and the interrelation between levels of literary response and cognitive development.

As cognitive process theories were elaborated in the eighties, research from the standpoint of developmental psychology increased. Harste, Woodward and Burke (1984) challenged the behavioral and cognitive views of literacy and advocated a transactional view, supported by the research work of Vygotsky on the transaction of thought and language. The transactional view of learning is based on socio-psycholinguistic principles. It assumes meaning resides neither in the environment nor in the head of the learner but in the transaction between the two.

Studies of reading by David Bloom and Judith Green (1984) also led to the development of sociolinguistic perspectives of reading which consider both how reading is used to establish a social context and how the social context influences reading response and the communication of meaning. This research paralleled the research in response to literature during the eighties. A study by Golden and Guthrie (1986) on convergence and divergence in reader response to literature examined commonalities and variations in reader response to a short story by 63 grade nine students. Their study indicated high degrees of agreement on reader beliefs and text events but found variation in reader empathy and text conflict; these findings help to confirm that interpretation is an interaction between text and reader and point to the complexity of literary response.

Charles Cooper (1985) credited the new developments in psycholinguistic and cognitive psychology with stimulating huge research efforts in the mid-seventies and eighties into the nature of reading comprehension and the child as reader. At the same time a revolution in literary theory and criticism overturned the dominance of the objective text as the chief object of study and instruction and allowed reader-response to achieve new prominence.

Like the work of Rosenblatt (1938, 1978), the phenomenological approach to the reading process, advocated by Wolgang Iser (1980), helped to change our views of literature as an object to literature as an experience, with readers as active performers who bring texts to life in our minds. The text activates us as readers to produce meaning, influenced by our personal experience and cultural history, our present representation of the world and the reading conventions we have internalized (Thomson, 1984). For Iser, our response to a text is a dynamic process of constructing meaning, organizing textual elements, formulating expectations and retrospectively modifying previous understanding. These activities, he claims, are the origins of much of the pleasure we derive from reading. If our expectations are totally fulfilled by the book, we find it too predictable and become bored. In good literature, the author activates our imagination by allowing a zone of freedom around the characters; our imagination takes over and fills in the gaps left by the author. In this way we recreate the novel with our personal experience and understanding. Many great novelists such as George Eliot, Henry James and Tolstoy leave gaps that less mature readers find hard to fill in. Episodic or discontinuous texts, such as the novels of Joyce or Faulkner, require even more effort by the reader to interact with the text, especially if the setting is remote in time and place. Many young readers find it difficult to enter the world of such a novel or to suspend scepticism sufficiently to become Iser's "implied reader" and travel imaginatively inside the text.

Jack Thomson's research (1986, 1987) builds on the contemporary literary theories of Iser, the psychoanalytic theories of Norman Holland (1973) which also advocate intense imaginative involvement in reading, and the developmental theories of reading of Harding and Britton. Thomson conducted surveys of over a thousand Australian adolescent students, in 1978 and 1984, to determine their reading strategies. Interviews with over 50 of these students in 1978 led to a tentative developmental model of response to literature with associated reading strategies which he tested in interviews with students in 1984. He discovered that readers' satisfactions are ordered in successive stages of increasing complexity of response.

At the first two levels, readers move from unreflective interest in action and stereotyped characters to an ability to empathize with characters as they read. On levels three and four, readers are able to realize implications of characters for their own lives, begin to develop understanding of more complex viewpoints and fill in larger textual gaps. The final stages involve the ability to reflect on the author's view of the world and become aware of the relationship between reader and text. Thomson's research suggests that teenage readers need to first experience texts with a sharply focused point of view and a world that can easily entice them to become the "implied reader" before they can enjoy more complex books.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER

> ...they (teachers) are suspicious of a gulf between the actual responses of children and what as teachers they *feel* should be made of the stories read...they are uncertain of what their own role should be in "teaching" a novel. They are uncomfortably aware that there are no clear links between teaching and pupil response, no clear models of how that response develops, and not even any consensus about the kind of language in which to explore these processes.
> (Robert Protherough, 1983, p.4)

Thomson's research emphasizes the problems we encounter as teachers when we expect students who have not yet experienced the satisfaction of reading at lower levels to respond at higher levels to more complex texts. Thomson suggests that we need to understand the developmental sequence of reading, guiding students through the strategy levels of response by creating contexts for genuine literary response with a wide reading program where students' personal choices are valued. We can help students choose books by being well acquainted with adolescent literature and providing in-class reading time, using small group discussions of literature and reading journals to encourage reflection, and offering numerous after-reading activities to enhance pleasure and understanding of the books. Many students in his study were surprised at the notion they should be actively doing anything while they read. Students can be helped to interrogate the text by predicting, speculating on what will happen and retrospectively reflecting on their ideas, thereby becoming more conscious of their reading processes and their own identities. This reflective exploration of their interaction with literature helps to develop their reading ability and self-understanding.

Two other recent studies of response to literature also emphasize the important effects of the classroom context and the teacher's role in helping students to respond to texts. Marshall (1987) found that responses of 80 eleventh grade students to short stories were constrained within a limited range by the discourse convention of the classroom, which operated within a narrow academic tradition and discouraged them from articulating personal reactions to the stories. The teacher seldom asked students to focus on what was being personally lived through and discouraged them from elaborating on personal responses in their writing.

Susan Hynds (1989) examined social influences on the reading processes of four adolescent readers and the relationship between social-cognition factors and the students' responses to short stories. This study also supports the contention that classroom technique and activities influence readers' responses. The students' perceptions of how teachers see reading plays a large part in their literary responses, their attitudes towards reading and the stances they take towards texts. The four students in the study spoke of the constraining influence of constant evaluation and teachers' rejection of student responses in favour of their own. The students responded positively to teachers who were willing to be co-learners in literary analysis.

This study suggests that teachers need to model literature as a way of learning about and reflecting on life and be willing to offer choices of response modes. As Rosenblatt suggests, the teacher of literature "inevitably deals with the experiences of human beings in their diverse personal and social relations" (1938, p.5). We need to encourage students to focus more on Rosenblatt's "aesthetic" stance to reading, where the reader creates meaning in an interaction of personal life experiences and textual elements, rather than on a predominantly "efferent" stance, focusing on information to be sifted from the text. By enabling students to bring personal understandings to literature we help to make reading a fundamental part of their future lives.

A study of the relationship between junior high school teachers' personal approaches to literature and their teaching of literature (Zancanella, 1991) reflects the perceived difficulties many teachers have in relating their personal knowledge of the reading process to classroom practice. As a group, the teachers in the study approached reading as imaginative experience, selecting works which offered characters with whom they could identify and plot and setting into which they could project themselves. Their ability to relate these personal approaches to literature to their teaching was obstructed by a school version of literature which contradicted how and why they themselves read and by a feeling of pressure to teach literary language to prepare students for high school and external tests.

While attempting to teach literature as imaginative experience, the participants spent most of their classroom time on basic literature teaching procedures which focused on "making sense of the story", and teaching terms such as "theme" and "setting". There was also conflict between the teacher's interpretation and the students' interpretations; teachers that encouraged students to arrive at their own interpretations of literature nevertheless felt the need to determine which interpretations are valid and capped their classes by stating the lesson they believed should be taken from the story. (p.27) The participants also expressed concern over the conflict between teaching "reading" and teaching "literature". They associated "reading" with the elementary curriculum and teaching comprehension, and "literature" with the high school curriculum. As junior high teachers they felt comfortable with neither.

Zancanella suggests that what these teachers lack is both an explicit understanding of the knowledge residing in their personal approaches to literature and a theoretical understanding of literature and teaching literature which might help them to articulate such knowledge and relate it to the school version of the study of literature. Many junior high teachers today gained their sense of formal literature study from classrooms dominated by New Critical principles which itemized and decontextualized literary principles in order to make them teachable and "transferable" and dismissed "readerly" knowledge as insignificant. Our challenge today is to sense the potential of our own reading experience as important pedagogical knowledge and use this in our language arts classrooms.

LITERATURE RESOURCES FOR THE CLASSROOM

> Junior high school students, like all readers, are engaged and entertained by literature that is written at a level they can comprehend, by topics that they can appreciate and understand from their own experience.
> (Alberta Education, 1990).

Junior high teachers seeking to adopt a reader-response approach to literature in their classrooms are able to draw on literary resources provided by Alberta Education. The 1987 Junior High Language Arts Curriculum Guide encourages students to read for aesthetic enjoyment and actively participate in reading by focusing on their ideas and experiences as they read a text.

Alberta Education's 1990 Junior High Novels and Non-Fiction list is intended to be used in conjunction with the curriculum guide. It recommends teachers try giving students choices of books to read instead of a set class novel and using strategies such as prereading activities, formulation of student questions, predictions and reactions to ideas during and after reading, and the use of reading response journals and listening logs to facilitate student enjoyment and appreciation of the literature. These strategies are consistent with a reader-response approach to literature and cited research.

This recommended reading list provides an annotated source of 62 young adult fiction and non-fiction books for grades seven, eight and nine. The selected books cover a wide range of reading levels within each grade and include a blend of genres, with realistic, historical and speculative fiction, mystery and myth and a number of twentieth century classics.

The list was compiled by a review committee in conjunction with a large number of Alberta teachers who read and field-tested books in their classrooms, offering recommendations on the quality of the literature and student responses to the books. The original 1500 titles were chosen from Canadian publishers' selections, library journals, award-winning young adult books, well-known Canadian, American and British authors, books currently in use in junior high classrooms and a world-wide selection of award-winning books from other English speaking countries. A tentative list of titles was piloted in 1989 with a subsequent review during which four titles were changed. The final novel list, published in 1990, was distributed to superintendents, school boards and principals and the novels were made available through the Learning Resources Distribution Centre. The Junior High Novel and Non-Fiction list supersedes the previous selection of novels authorized in the 1978 Junior High Curriculum Guide.

In the introduction to the 1990 novel list, emphasis is placed on reading for enjoyment as well as appreciation and understanding. The novels have been chosen in the hope that they will be of interest to a wide range of students with diverse reading interests and abilities. The selection committee also stresses that it sought novels with the ability to expand students' vision and perception of the world, of themselves and others, show them the power and beauty of language and challenge them to consider the nature of good and evil. (p. 1)

CONCLUSION

If we, as teachers, share Meek's belief that reading literature is "literate *activity* that can bring everyone a fuller enjoyment of life" (1991, p. 182), we will endeavour to encourage our students to share this enjoyment. We can try to select novels with wide student appeal for classroom reading or offer students choices of books to read. We can also create contexts for enjoyable experiences with reading in the classroom by encouraging students' personal responses to the literature they read and allowing students to share and reflect on their responses with ourselves and with peers. When our teaching of literature reduces the disparity between what students "have to read" and what they "want to read" and our teaching strategies are supportive of students' personal and communal responses to the novels, we may be well on the way to helping our students become lifelong readers.

CHAPTER TWO

PURPOSE AND DESIGN OF THE STUDY

THE COMPLEXITY OF THE READING PROCESS

Current research into both the reading process and students' response to literature suggests they are complex processes which we do not yet fully understand. It has become increasingly clear, from the insights of Frank Smith (1988) and other psycholinguistics, that concern over how adolescents read must take the initial stages of children's experiences with reading fully into account.

The central issue in the debate over reading has focused on reading-for-meaning: The work of Smith and Goodman (1985) stresses the importance of the knowledge readers bring to a text in search of meaning, and reading is viewed as a social practice; in the skills approach, learning letter-sound relationships is seen as the first step to word identification and fluent reading. The division may be seen in terms of contrasting metaphors of a garden and a machine: the one organic and the other a mechanical explanation of reality. In many classrooms the psycholinguistic view of reading has proved revolutionary in teaching initial reading and reduced subskills to a secondary position. Willinsky (1990) cautions however, that these two paradigms have co-existed for a number of years and will probably continue to do so.

Standardized reading tests have been the norm for evaluating students' reading levels and providing information for categorizing texts, yet such tests do not take into account many important factors which Smith suggests affect comprehension to a large degree. He believes that prior knowledge of content, form and genre, a reader's interest, motivation, self-esteem and the context in which a text is presented or read, all need to be taken into consideration in the reading process. He also suggests that behavioural responses to texts, such as predicting and bringing personal experience to the text, are as important indicators of reading potential as any score of subskills in phonics or word recognition.

The work of Smith (1988), Loban (1976) and Moffett (1968, 1976) also points to the interdependence of the language arts strands of listening, speaking, viewing, reading and writing and suggests that reading is learned in concert with general language development. It is learned best in a setting with positive linguistic stimulation, where students listen to others read and talk, participate in focused and open-ended discussion and are exposed to related audial and visual stimuli, and symbolizing activities such as role play, choral reading or drawing (Gutteridge, 1983, p.8). This research also indicates the presence of a responsive adult reflecting a love of books and language as a positive influence in the early reading process.

Interest, motivation, home background and prior experience are now seen as primary, not secondary factors in a consideration of students' reading. As teachers we can no longer assume that reading is only a cognitive activity relating to some kind of general intelligence and that eventually the "good readers" will emerge. Reading is now being viewed as both less technical in terms of subskills and more complex in its relationship with temperament, disposition, range and quality of prior knowledge and linguistic experiences than we previously thought.

Current research into reading has important implications for teachers and students in junior high language arts classes. It suggests that the selection of student literature, teachers' strategies in the classroom and the perceptions of their roles as reading teachers are all vital factors in determining students' attitudes towards literature, and their enjoyment of reading.

Longitudinal studies of teenagers' reading such as Thomson's (1987) have increased our insights in these areas but much remains uncertain about how readers engage in processing text. A recent study by Margaret Mackey (1991) of the association between students' reading of text and their own individual reading histories also stresses the complexity of the issue. The grade eleven students in her study responded orally to two common texts during their reading; Mackey interviewed them about their reading histories and asked them to comment on eighteen first pages of a wide range of novels. Her effort to balance experience of common texts with a personal retrospective presented a complicated and unpredictable picture of individual readers and resulted in "accounts of four readers which show a rich variety of approaches, attitudes and aptitudes. No simple reading score could ever sum up this quality of information" (p. 112).

When teachers attribute values to the reading of fiction, choose books for students, establish the aims of reading programs or decide how to use a novel with a class, they do so in the light of their existing knowledge of teenagers' responses and their predictions based on this information. In most cases that knowledge is implicit and often unformulated. Protherough (1983) believes that teachers' choice of fiction to read with students, or to offer them for their own reading, is inevitably linked with the teacher's views of what reading is *for* (p. 7). He suggests that their perceptions of the major purposes of reading literature can be distinguished into three main groups:

a. personal function, assuming literature gives pleasure and develops understanding of self and others;
b. curricular function, which assumes literature has linguistic functions, developing students' own use of language and helping their understanding of the world;

c. literary function, which assumes that literary appreciation is increased by awareness of concept forms and structures used in fiction and knowledge of literary history.

Different teachers, he suggests, will attribute different comparative degrees of importance to each of these functions.

Discussion with teachers currently teaching junior high language arts about their choices of novels and their teaching strategies may help to increase our understanding of how and why we teach fiction in school and the implications of choosing texts and teaching methods. Such specific conversations may also exemplify principles and strategies by which teachers work out their own coherent literature programs and help us to understand our own reasons for text selection and teaching strategies in the classroom.

THE PRESENT STUDY

PURPOSE

My aim in developing this study was to explore these issues of literature selection and use in the classroom from the perspective of a number of junior high language arts teachers in Alberta. I hoped to discover which resources these teachers are using in making literary selections for their students' classroom reading or for encouraging students' independent reading. I hoped to gain insight into their experience of teaching literature, the reading context they have established for their students in the classroom and how they have encouraged students' responses to the literature.

For the purposes of my study, I have limited the definition of literature to novels. I have chosen to describe response to literature by using the definition offered by Charles Cooper (1985):

> The term "response" suggests the full complexity of the reading process, from decoding to inference, as well as the particular demands of the uniquely aesthetic, globally contextualized reading which fictional literature requires.... The term suggests the importance of the reader's role, the reader's culture, reading experience, preferences and predisposition, ...and expands our view of the reading process to include not only the evocation and evaluation of the work during reading but the expressed response which follows the reading. (p.xi)

DATA COLLECTION

My primary mode of data collection was person-to-person interviewing to gather information on the teachers' criteria for novel selection and teaching strategies in the classroom and also to explore their beliefs about reading and learning. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by a number of predetermined questions which I sent to teachers ahead of time. This procedure enabled me to translate my research objectives into specific language and enabled the teachers to prepare for the interview, if they so chose. I was able to define my interest in the teachers' novel selections through my questions, explain the time frame of my interest and encourage the teachers to reflect on their criteria for literature selection and the resources they used in making these selections. I included a question referring to Alberta Education's selection of novels as this has recently been authorized as a recommended reading list for Alberta junior high students.

I also hoped to gain specific information about teaching strategies within each classroom by categorizing what I believed to be the three most popular formats for literature teaching in junior high classrooms based on D.W. Harding's three "modes of approach" to literature and explained in detail in Tchudi and Mitchell (1989, p.167): whole class novel studies, small group reading and individualized reading programs.

I hoped my questions would enable respondents to define the purpose of my interview and encourage them to share their perspectives of what was happening in their literature classes. I wanted the questions to be open-ended enough to encourage a variety of responses within this limited framework. Using the questions as a guideline allowed me to obtain specific information from each teacher while responding to individual situations and exploring unique situations through discussion and reflective responses.

All the interviews were audiotaped and transcribed to ensure as much accuracy as possible in the data presentation. Several teachers were also willing to share copies of their class reading strategies, unit plans, reading and group projects, evaluation criteria and student book selections with me. This enabled me to augment the interview data with relevant documentation.

SELECTION OF TEACHERS

Junior high language arts teachers were chosen from school boards in and around the Edmonton area and in rural Alberta. I sought advice from language arts consultants with several school boards and professors in English Education at the University of Alberta in selecting teachers who might be willing to be interviewed and interested in participating in the study. Friends and colleagues also recommended teachers from their children's schools. In total, the names of eighteen language arts teachers from six different Alberta school boards were suggested.

I contacted these teachers to explain the nature of my study and asked if they would be willing to be interviewed during the following month. All the teachers agreed and times and locations for the interviews were arranged. Participants were assured of anonymity in the data presentation. I sent the teachers a summary of my research proposal and my proposed interview questions prior to the interview. (Appendix 1)

THE TEACHERS IN THE STUDY

The eighteen teachers, five male and thirteen female, represented a broad range of teaching experience, from two years to more than twenty years. Seven of the teachers had been teaching junior high language arts for more than ten years; the majority graduated from the University of Alberta and had previous experience in either elementary or high school. Some respondents were teaching only one grade of language arts in addition to teaching other subject areas, while several taught the whole spectrum of grades in junior high language arts. In 1990-1991, fourteen of the teachers were teaching grade nine language arts, eleven taught grade eight classes and seven teachers taught grade seven.

THE INTERVIEWS

The interviews were conducted during May, 1991, allowing teachers to reflect on their literature teaching for most of that school year. All the teachers I interviewed expressed interest in my study and were very cooperative in taking time from their busy schedules to discuss their novel selection and teaching strategies with me. The following questions were posed to the teachers:

1. Which novels have you taught in your classroom this year?
2. Why did you select these particular books?
3. Did any of the books come from Alberta Education's 1990 recommended reading list?
4. Did you use the books for whole class reading, group reading or individual reading?
5. What was your experience teaching the books?
6. What kinds of reading strategies did you use in the classroom?

7. What were students' responses to the books?

The interviews were guided by the common research questions, but each conversation was unique in its focus and perspective, reflecting the different personalities of the teachers and the varied attitudes and approaches to reading and student response to literature. Contexts for the interviews also varied: most were conducted in teachers' classrooms or in staffrooms, two in my office at university, two at a conference and one in a private home.

The interviews also changed over the research period as I became more familiar with the interview process and was able to build on earlier discussions to make connections between interviews. I had read almost all the novels on Alberta Education's recommended list and a range of young adult literature before beginning the interviews, but inevitably teachers discussed novels with which I was unfamiliar. This situation also changed somewhat during later interviews as by then I had had the opportunity to read books mentioned earlier in the research process and was able to ask more pertinent questions about their selection.

DATA PRESENTATION

As I reflected on the volume and variety of my collected data, it became apparent that to try to provide profiles of all eighteen teachers would be confusing for readers of my study; the profiles would also be unbalanced in portraying teachers whose interviews were conducted at different times during the research process and in different contexts. Because numerous common themes relating to student reading, literature selection and teaching strategies in the classroom emerged from the data, I have organized these themes with reference to relevant quotes from teachers to provide the flavour of the interviews.

Following the three "modes of approach" to literature reading in the junior high classroom suggested in my interview questions, I categorized the teaching strategies into whole class novel studies, group reading and independent reading and discussed them with relation to teachers' comments and ideas. From these discussions, readers will be able to gain insight into the richness and variety of the strategies teachers used to encourage students to read with more enjoyment and understanding.

Anticipating that this study might be of interest to classroom teachers and educational researchers, I have written the findings, reflections and hypotheses to reflect the qualitative nature of the study and to appeal to an audience beyond the university setting.

QUALITATIVE STUDIES

As in all qualitative, descriptive research, the goal of this study is to understand the meaning embedded in people's experience. Belief, not facts, form the basis of perception and reality is viewed as pluralistic, subjective and open to personal interpretation. (Merriam, 1988, pp. 16-17)

Alfred Schutz (1970) explains that in a qualitative approach to research we are examining events and data which have been selected and interpreted by our informants. These interpretations and assumptions about the way the world operates are based on people's stock of knowledge grounded both in their own personal experiences and the experiences of others which they have come to accept. Their actions in a social situation are meaningful to them in terms of their motives, which include both their projections of actions before the fact and their explanations of the reasons for doing what they did after the event.

In interviewing these participants, we cannot know the total context of the action nor share the stock of knowledge which is taken for granted by the participants; we can only attempt to understand the action from their point of view and try to see the event as meaningful within the context of their motives and perceptions.

All qualitative studies are limited both by the ability of the respondents to describe their situation accurately, to understand and verbalize their beliefs and actions, and by the researcher's sensitivity, communication skills and ability to gather meaningful information using an interview technique and to interpret and analyze that information.

Qualitative research aims at presenting a meaningful, holistic account of an issue. Findings from descriptive studies are usually written in a narrative form with allusions and quotations selected to support the findings. A narrative constitutes an invitation for readers to participate vicariously in the situation described, to look and see as the researcher did, thereby gaining insight into the nature and meaning of a phenomenon which may shape their thinking about their own inquiries. (Connelly and Clandinin, 1990)

Theorizing about the data allows the researcher to explain some aspect of educational practice and to draw inferences about future activities. Such speculation is the key to developing theory in a qualitative study and attempts to achieve a balance between the complexity of reality and simplification of those complexities. (Merriam, 1988, p.141)

From this qualitative study, I hoped to gain insight into how a number of language arts teachers, faced with a diversity of abilities and reading interests among their students and a wide range of young adult literature, are currently making novel selections and organizing their junior high literature programs.

CHAPTER THREE

EMERGENT THEMES

Eight common themes relating to novel selection, students' reading interests and abilities, and to teachers' concerns in helping students respond to the literature with enjoyment and increasing maturity emerged from the data. I have discussed these themes with relevant quotes from interviewed teachers in the hope of providing readers with insights into the complex issues of novel selection and teaching strategies in the junior high language arts classroom.

CONCERN OVER STUDENTS' LACK OF INTEREST IN READING

All the respondents were enthusiastic about teaching at the junior high level and expressed concern and interest in developing their students' love of reading. Many of the teachers indicated that junior high students today show little interest in reading. Several teachers explained the strategies they have used to understand their students' interests and reading habits. One teacher told me:

> At the start of the year I write a letter to students about myself and they write back. Many of them said they didn't like to read.

Another commented:

> My reading survey I gave them at the start of the year showed they did have lots of books at home, but later many of them admitted they read very little.

Three teachers explained that although most students were reluctant to admit they were non-readers at the start of the school year, many of them revealed later in their reading journals that they had never finished reading a novel independently before the start of the current school year.

This lack of interest in reading is reflected in Thomson's 1987 survey of Australian teenagers' reading which found that a majority of the students in his study associated reading with boredom and were highly critical of the books they were asked to read in English. (p.23)

A 1988 reading survey of 150 Edmonton junior high school students endorses these findings. More than half of the surveyed students ranked reading among the three activities they most disliked, along with doing chores and practising the piano (Stacey, 1988). The compiler of the survey, Cherylyn Stacey, suggests it is "misplaced zeal to try to get students reading what teachers think is good for them. The challenge is to get them reading at all."

THE PROBLEM WITH TELEVISION

Television was frequently mentioned during my interviews as a possible cause for the decline in reading:

> The kids today think they don't need to read any more.They can see everything on T.V. or videos or find it on the computer. There are exceptions; I do have some avid readers.

> I think kids' reading interests have changed over the years. They're unwilling to pick a book up by themselves. The influence of T.V. in the last ten years is very marked.

Jack Thomson (1987) agrees that television is one of the most powerful influences shaping the lives and attitudes of students today. He points out that most popular programs for teenagers have impoverished language, simplistic plots and violent or sentimentalized action which condition students' expectations of language possibilities and limit the development of their imagination:

> The consistent, passive, unreflective and undiscussed viewing of television is undoubtedly destructive of the work of teachers who are trying to develop the reading habit in their students. (p.39)

He explains that teenagers are enticed by television programs that seem to offer insights into the issues that concern them: their need for acceptance by peers, their problems of relationship with parents and members of the opposite sex and interest in exploring peoples' life roles. All these interests can be met by fiction if teachers are aware of the appropriate authors and books available. (p.53)

Margaret Meek (1988) believes television and books can be allies and one need not drive the other out. However, she stresses the need to be clear about the differences offered by the two; a multi-layered novel turned into a film, while retaining the characters and plot, has its "meanings" translated into visual dimensions which changes the experience. (p.38) Teenagers used to watching television to practise their interpretive processes find difficulty in tolerating the slow speed of many classical texts where the scene is set in passages of description before the action commences or where there are instances of text recall. (p.37) They are used to visual flashbacks which go back literally in a flash and are far less demanding. She suggests teachers therefore need to give students wide experience of different types of texts in order to help them understand the meaning and power of reading novels.

TEACHERS READING ALOUD

Fourteen of the eighteen teachers interviewed stressed the benefits of reading novels or parts of novels aloud to their junior high classes.

One teacher told me how much he and his students enjoyed the times he read part of a novel aloud to them and how this helped the students to become interested in the book:

> I think it's important to read aloud to kids. It helps them to listen and visualize what they hear...they all have different personal reactions. It's a good contrast with T.V. where they see everything on the screen.

Another teacher also related the need for oral reading to students' frequent T.V. viewing:

> Sometimes reading a novel to students is best; it makes it more enjoyable for them. The problem is that when they read themselves they're so used to tuning T.V. in and out that they do it when they read too.

One teacher explained that he read the novel The Cay aloud to his grade seven class and that he was able to bring the book alive by changing his voice to represent Timothy, the old Jamaican man, and Philip, the boy. In his view: "To be a good English teacher you need to be a sort of actor too."

Another grade seven teacher also mentioned she read The Cay aloud to her students:

> The kids really like me to read aloud. It's more fun and provides a cushion for them from having to do everything themselves. I enjoy it too; I stop at significant places and let them comment if they wish.

Sometimes teachers chose to read aloud because of lack of availability of a certain book. One teacher read the Canadian novel Nightmare Mountain by Myra Paperny to a grade seven class because she liked the book and was unable to obtain enough copies for all students. They responded by imagining themselves as one of the characters and writing a journal.

She also chose the fantasy novel Magic Kingdom for Sale/Sold by Terry Brooks to read to her grade eight classes when the book was first on Alberta Education's recommended list and multiple copies not yet available. She explained that several boys, but very few girls, in the classes were already avid fantasy readers and that this book was a good introduction to the genre:

> I read the book to them and we did cooperative learning activities with it. I divided them into four groups and assigned each a different aspect of the book: theme, character, plot and setting. They discussed their topic in the group and every fifth

> chapter they would share what they had learned with the rest of the class and rotate to discuss another element. They had different responsibilities within the group for each rotation. They managed to keep up with the novel just listening to it...kept notes as I read and made plot diagrams. It worked well ... they enjoyed the novel and were interested in reading the sequel.

In another school the teacher read William Goldman's The Princess Bride to her grade nine students because she was unable to obtain multiple copies for the students in the class:

> It was an excellent choice. The kids loved it and enjoyed hearing me read it aloud; they really got into it and many of them bought their own copies.

Choosing to read a book orally in this way allows a teacher to circumvent the problem of only choosing books that are available in the school stockroom and which may be dated in their immediacy and interest for today's students.

Another choice of a book to read aloud was The King's Fifth by Scott O'Dell. This teacher felt it was not always easy for her grade eight students to sit and listen, and that a listening log could focus their response to the novel both during and after reading. She also responded to her students' logs. She stressed that some books are far more suitable for oral reading than others and recommended Paula Fox's The Slave Dancer as another good choice for reading to grade eights.

In two instances teachers chose to read a novel aloud because they felt it would be too challenging and confusing for most students to read independently. One explained that a previous grade nine class had read Robert Cormier's I am the

Cheese by themselves and found it very confusing; she was disappointed with their negative responses to the book. This time as she read the book aloud, students wrote down questions and comments as they listened:

> I felt they needed support with the book, so I read it to them. They wrote in their journals as they listened.... They asked questions about the text about things they didn't understand. We shared notes and figured the book out together. They began to realize that Cormier deliberately confuses his readers so they can share the confusion the character feels. I picked up this idea at an inservice and found these interactive notes really helped them to understand and enjoy the novel more.

The other teacher enjoyed Gillian Cross's book On the Edge so much she wanted her grade nine students to read it too but was concerned it might be too complex for some of them to read alone:

> I thought they needed guidance as the plot is quite complex and some would find it frustrating, so I read it aloud to them. It deals with so many interesting issues and sent us off in many different directions.... We talked about families, different kinds of relationships and people's rights. They were interested in laws, rules, criminals and the brainwashing that the book deals with. Some of the language is difficult for them because the book is British, but I think it's good for them to read books from other countries.... They enjoyed it on the whole.

James Britton (1970) explains that when a teacher reads to a class, at least three important processes are going on at the same time: firstly the class is functioning as a single group and the communal experience is valuable; secondly, listening is in itself an active and important process and students are gaining experience in the use of language. The reader can do a great deal with the written words through tone of voice, tempo, intonation, stress and gesture all of which enhance the experience of the book for the listeners. Thirdly, Britton stresses that the gaining of life experience, the major incentive behind most of the reading we do, can be enhanced by the solid satisfaction derived from listening to a book and students are thereby encouraged to read more for themselves.(pp. 150-151)

David Jackson (1983), writing in Encounters With Books: Teaching Fiction 11-16, also promotes oral reading by the teacher:

> One primary way of sparking off curiosities about reading and motivating pupils' interest in stories is for the teacher to read carefully chosen extracts from some of the books in the class library. Reading aloud is a neglected art. A good reader can often make the words lift off the page and enter the pupils' head with the right dramatic emphasis, timing and tone. (p.44)

Ken Watson (1981, 1987) discusses the value of reading aloud for classes with a wide range of reading abilities. He cautions that care must be taken to find novels which are not too long and which offer something to interest both the able and not so able student. His suggestions for books which meet these criteria include Dragonslayer by Rosemary Sutcliff, I am David by Anne Holm, The Eighteenth Emergency by Betsy Byars for grades seven and eight, and for grade nine students: John Steinbeck's The Pearl, Z for Zachariah by Robert O'Brien and Paul Zindel's The Pigman. (p.117)

Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) stress that some students in junior high schools may never have read a whole book before and will respond positively to oral reading by the teacher. They suggest that many students may be surprised at how much their teacher is enjoying the book too. (p.371)

Reading aloud is also an important feature of the reading workshop advocated by Nancie Atwell. In her mini-lessons which begin her workshop she frequently reads aloud short stories that she likes and thinks her students will enjoy. She stresses that reading aloud is a skill unto itself and takes constant practice. Some junior high teachers may share her original perception that

> oral reading is something primary level teachers did to entertain little kids; I assumed that as kids grew they left behind the pleasure of listening to stories. (p.208)

From the positive responses of her students to her reading she learned this was not true:

> Eighth graders - all of us - are enthralled by a good read-aloud. More importantly read-alouds led many kids to borrow the books I shared and to look for other works by those authors, to go beyond listening to a more active and personal involvement with texts. (p.208)

TEACHERS NEED TO READ THEMSELVES

Almost all the teachers I interviewed mentioned that as junior high language arts teachers they felt the need to read a wide range of young adult novels themselves. Many considered they had insufficient time to read new books. One vice-principal who was teaching grade seven language arts had taught The Cay and Farley Mowat's Lost in the Barrens for a number of years but mentioned he would like to make time to read more novels from Alberta Education's recommended reading list and try new novels in the future.

Similarly a teacher at a combined junior/senior high school felt that with the demands of teaching higher grades she had less time than she would have liked to read many new books from the junior high recommended list. She was not unhappy with the choices of novels she had made as she felt that her grade seven students related well to the themes of prejudice and coming-of-age illuminated by The Cay and the adolescent search for identity embodied in Anne Holm's book I am David. For grade nine she taught Leon's Garfield's Smith and John Steinbeck's The Pearl. She agreed that not all students liked these novels but that they were a good preparation for high school. These books had been used in the school for a number of years and she expressed interest in recommendations of other books which would be suitable for whole class studies in the future.

Another teacher who did whole class novel studies this year stressed the need to find novels that appeal to a wide ranges of interests and abilities. She also felt she needed to like the book herself in order to teach it effectively.

Similar feelings were expressed by a teacher in the same school district who said:

> The biggest problem is that nobody has time to read everything on the list. I usually find a book by accident, read it and if I like it I decide to try it with the students. I don't like to stumble into a novel.... I need to be well prepared and have comprehension questions and activities organized.

This teacher selected books which he felt related to "where students are at in their lives." He chose Monica Hughes The Keeper of the Isis Light and Lloyd Alexander's Taran Wanderer for his grade nines because they are coming-of-age novels which respond to adolescents' question of "who am I?"

Another teacher who did whole class novel studies of Cynthia Voigt's The Homecoming with her grade eight classes felt she would like to give these students more choice of novels to read in small groups next year and planned to do more reading this summer to find suitable books:

> No one novel will suit all students.... Sometimes we have to teach what we have available in the school.... For grade eight next year I may order a few more books and do reading in groups, but I need to know the books myself first.

A teacher who does group reading with his grade seven and nine classes chose books he has read over the past few years that he feels students will enjoy. He stressed the need to keep up to date with current young adult literature and find books that relate to junior high students' lives and interests.

Teachers who restructured their language arts classes into reading workshops felt even more pressure to read a wide selection of novels that they could recommend to students for independent reading. These teachers understood that students would inevitably choose some books they themselves had not read. Several teachers mentioned that they had discovered new, enjoyable books for their own reading through recommendations from their students in independent reading. They also stressed that students accept recommendations from peers more readily than from the teacher or from a librarian, so allowing students to share responses to books with the class through book talks or project presentations often inspired more students to read that book.

This sentiment is reflected in Robert Protherough's comments:

> In some classrooms, the fact that the teacher has selected a book can be the kiss of death. Many investigations at different ages have concurred in the conclusion that children prefer what they themselves have chosen and that this preference is reflected in a greater readiness to persevere with the book. (1983, p.152)

Stacey's 1988 reading survey of Edmonton students emphasized a similar concern:

> A particular sample would come in with a large number of students reporting the same dislike. One group said in many different ways that it disliked "classics" - by which they appeared to mean interpretive literature. Another group disliked survival stories set in nature. As student after student reported this dislike in different words, it began to appear that they were all referring to Lost in the Barrens.... I can only assume that some of our novel studies have given rise to whole

> groups of young people who henceforth categorise themselves as haters of a particular type of novel, because they have not enjoyed one classroom encounter with one example of the type. (p.4)

Stacey did modify this concern by stating that 21 of the 150 students surveyed named their novel study as their favourite book, suggesting that it is possible to choose novels that have wide student appeal.

SELECTING NOVELS COLLABORATIVELY

Many teachers felt they had good support within their school or their district for resources in choosing books. In many cases the librarian was named as a great help in recommending books for teachers to use in class and for students to read independently:

> When they do their independent reading I tell them to go and ask our librarian for help. She is excellent and very familiar with young adult literature. She asks them about themselves and suggests books they may enjoy. I work together with her and let her know which students are reluctant readers.

In larger schools with many classes at each grade level, language arts teachers often worked together to decide on books to teach for each grade. Sometimes this resulted in lack of agreement and a decision to stay with the same novel taught in previous years:

> At our meeting we selected three new novels from the list that we considered doing, but we couldn't agree on one so we stuck with the Hinton book for all the grade eight classes.... I've ordered 100 new copies of The Outsiders for next year.

This was not, however, seen as a negative decision as all these teachers agreed on the merits of Hinton's book:

> The boys in grade eight think they're so cool and macho. They need a novel which appeals to them, and this one never fails. I was the first teacher here to use The Outsiders in 1978 and I still love it. It's part of our identity unit. Now we have a really good handout on the novel which checks vocabulary and comprehension and suggests discussion questions which we do in small groups.... They select one project to do.... They also do a review of the movie: discuss how it is made and comment on at least four elements in their review.... Many of them go on to read other Hinton books.

In another large school the four language arts teachers also taught the same novels to classes in the same grade and worked cooperatively with the librarian in selecting novels for whole class study. They also retained The Outsiders for grade eight but taught two other books for the first time in this grade: they chose Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde by Robert Louis Stevenson for the "chuckles and chills" unit. They felt this book was a classic most students had heard about and provided a good extension for students as a literary study. It also enabled them to discuss the good and evil sides in a character. The teacher in my study stressed she led students into this book by reading them a variety of short spooky stories. She explained that the third book for grade eight was Monica Hughes' Keeper of the Isis Light which was recommended by the librarian for their science fiction unit and was a popular choice with many students who had heard Monica Hughes speak about her writing and enjoyed reading her books.

For grade nine, Animal Farm was taught to link with the social studies unit on Russia; The Hound of the Baskervilles by Conan Doyle was selected as one of the few classics on the recommended list; and Gillian Cross's On the Edge was recommended by the librarian. The teacher I interviewed explained this novel was taught in a less structured approach than the others, with students writing personal response journals as they read:

> We chose it for its suspense and unique style and felt the kids could relate it to themselves. Some of them got frustrated because they couldn't figure out what was happening.... The plot is so involved and they never really figured out why he got kidnapped.... I think it's good to try out some more creative ideas like this with journals where the students don't get tested on what they've read. We need to get away from multiple choice questions if we want them to grow as readers.

She also explained that her school had an independent reading period once in a six day cycle in addition to the three novel studies for each grade and that this program had been a great success with students in encouraging them to read with more enjoyment and share book titles.

For teachers deciding to allow students freedom to choose their own books and read in class, collaboration with other language arts teachers in their school was not as evident. In some cases the different approach led to resentment:

> A lot of people don't know where I'm coming from with the independent reading - other language arts teachers included. They're not convinced that reading in class is a valid activity because they

> don't read much themselves. They tell me: "I've taught them the theme of the book and now I'm giving them a test to see if they know it." I shudder at this. I've come to realize there are no set answers. We need to offer kids some freedom of choice and change things around with different classes.

Protherough (1983) addresses a similar issue when he cautions:

> We cannot necessarily assume that teachers are themselves keen and informed fiction readers. In one survey in two urban comprehensive schools...teachers read rather less fiction than their pupils and made less use of public libraries. (p. 149)

Other teachers doing reading workshops found they had more support within the school. One teacher told me:

> I'm the only language arts teacher in the school doing totally individual reading, but others do a variation...read in themes or small groups...and the librarian is supportive and helpful for all of us.

One teacher I interviewed is also a librarian, so was able to combine her expertise in book selection with her independent reading workshop:

> I really try to push students to read more and choose different types of books. I do book talks to encourage them, but usually just the same students respond. Most listen better to recommendations from each other, but some of the boys are hard to reach.

Several school districts have been supportive of teachers finding new ways to teach language arts and select books. Teachers from one district praised the help and advice they had received from the board office and resource centre in selecting novels. Two teachers from this board mentioned a project they had been involved in with Dr. Jon Stott from the

English Department of the University of Alberta in which he recommended six novels for junior high students. Both teachers now used some of these novels with their students including Jean Little's Mama's Going To Buy You a Mockingbird, Lloyd Alexander's Taran Wanderer and Katherine Paterson's The Great Gilly Hopkins.

Teachers with another school board praised a four week series of writers' workshop inservices organized through their school district with a consultant and a number of teachers. Teachers studied Nancie Atwell's writing and reading workshop and many of these ideas have since been implemented in the teachers' classrooms. A number of these teachers, who are continuing meeting regularly as a writers' group, mentioned the importance of this support group in finding new ideas and helping each other implement new ways of working with language and literature in their classrooms. One teacher explained:

> I'd been away from the classroom for eight years. I always used to teach the traditional class novel, but getting involved in the writers' workshop encouraged me to try group study of novels in the classroom, allowing my grade nines some choice in the novel they read, group discussions on the novels and a group project as well as an individual written assignment. They also do lots of independent reading with response journals; from the workshop group I got the idea of giving book talks and encouraging students to read books from different genres.

Teachers within one school district shared titles of novels that had been popular in their own classrooms. Waiting For The Rain, by Sheila Gordon, a young adult novel dealing with racism in South Africa, had been taught in a whole class novel study by one teacher I interviewed, was part of the selection of novels offered to students for group reading by another teacher and mentioned by a third teacher in the district as a novel that had been recommended to him and that he planned to introduce to students.

THE IMPACT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Fourteen of the eighteen teachers I interviewed mentioned some kind of professional development as an important factor in changing the way they select and teach literature or providing the incentive to try new ideas in encouraging their students to read with more interest and understanding. In some cases teachers had returned to university to take courses or an advanced degree:

> At university you hear new ideas and realize there are different ways of doing things in class. I like to be flexible and try out new ideas that may help my kids become better readers.

Others mentioned conferences they had attended which provided new perspectives and ideas which they have tried to incorporate into their teaching:

> I always try out new ideas after a conference. I never do things exactly the same twice. Different classes have different needs and abilities and I change novels to suit this.

Several mentioned the need to remain open to new ideas:

> I'm always trying new things. I never do the same things over and over. It's important to let

> students try different styles of writing, to find different themes in novels and a different focus for each activity. I love response journals now; they give me so much more insight into students than the traditional question-answer where they respond only to what they think the teacher wants. I found journal writing with my grade eights was too much for me to read but response to literature is more focused.

And from a teacher with 20 years experience in junior high:

> I'm always learning and trying new things even after 20 years. I don't like book reports any more.I could probably write a book entitled: '101 ways not to write a book report!' Now I ask them to respond through drama or art or writing. I haven't tried response journals yet but I intend to.

Other teachers pointed out that reading particular "research" books had influenced them to change their approach to teaching language arts. One teacher commented that Louise Rosenblatt's ideas on relating literature to students' lives and experience now provided the basis for his novel selections. Several others mentioned Nancie Atwell's book _In the Middle_ as revolutionizing their approach to novel selection and teaching strategies.

LINKING NOVEL SELECTION WITH SOCIAL STUDIES

Four of the interviewed teachers selected novels which they identified as being related to the social studies curriculum. Felice Holman's _The Wild Children_, a novel based on the true stories of homeless children after the Russian Revolution, was chosen by two teachers for its strong characterization and powerful story and because of its link with the grade nine social studies theme of Russia:

> It fits in with social studies but it's also a wonderful story and has an easy reading level. It worked well in class. I read the first section and we all wrote a response journal, including me.... We had both whole class and small group discussions on the major themes.... They wrote an essay at the end and did two self-selected projects.

A second teacher also felt this book appealed to both boys and girls and chose it for a whole class novel study in addition to the independent reading her students did for the rest of the year:

> I chose it as a kind of extension. It ties in with social studies; I liked it and the kids really enjoyed it. We read the first chapter together and discussed it. They made a time line and wrote responses while reading the rest, with a few quizzes to check their reading. We used small group discussions with a recorder and leader to report back to the rest of the class. This helped them to see other people's points of view. At the end they did one project alone and one with a partner.

One teacher considered The Wild Children for her grade nines, but finally decided on Jaap Ter Haar's novel Boris, which is recommended for grade seven. It is set in Russia during the siege of Leningrad during the Second World War and is a story of human suffering and courage seen through the eyes of a 12 year old boy:

> I like The Wild Children but I think Boris is easier for them to relate to. It's very vivid and shows the relationships between kids and their suffering. It ties in well with their social studies work too and helps them to understand what really happened in Russia.

Another choice of a novel related to Russia was George Orwell's Animal Farm, which the teacher chose as the final novel studied during grade nine:

> It's an easy reading level but most students have trouble moving beyond the fable aspect. I draw analogies with the world and help them see the theme of social injustice through political cartoons.... The book helps them to understand satire. We do both whole class and small group activities on the book.... We make a chart on the conflicts and brainstorm on the board about the characters Orwell wants to represent.... I try to help them see the Russian Revolution connections. We probably still teach it because three of us teach social studies as well as language arts and it's good to let the kids see connections.

Protherough (1983) comments on curricular choices for books:

> The topics and themes of some books are more obviously 'relevant' than those of others, either because they are concerned with experiences and ideas common in the class at the time, or because they can be related to work being done in other areas of the curriculum. (p.154)

NOVEL SELECTIONS FROM RECOMMENDED LISTS

Fifteen of the eighteen teachers I interviewed had in-depth knowledge of Alberta Education's 1990 Junior High Novels and Non-Fiction list (Appendix 2) and mentioned the list frequently during their discussion of novel selection. Of the 54 fiction titles on the recommended list, 31 were mentioned at least once during the interviews. For whole class novel studies, two teachers chose The Keeper of the Isis Light, two selected The Wild Children and two others On the Edge; The Hound of the Baskervilles, Angel Square, Boris, Dragonslayer, Homecoming, The Endless Steppe, Very Far Away From Anywhere Else, Magic Kingdom for Sale/Sold, Smith and The

King's Fifth were also taught in whole class settings. Novels for group reading also included The Keeper of the Isis Light, On the Edge, Magic Kingdom for Sale/Sold and Smith; and, in addition, Days of Terror, Beauty, Wolf of Shadows, Tom's Midnight Garden and Winners were offered as choices by some teachers.

Those teachers involved in reading workshop mentioned many of these same titles in discussing their recommendations to students. In addition, Dreamspeaker was discussed several times; some teachers claimed students had found the novel interesting, while others were concerned about recommending it because of the bleak ending and multiple suicides. Playing Beatie Bow and Ash Road, two Australian novels, were mentioned several times. Also Kashka, The Return, The Night Journey, Shadow in Hawthorn Bay, The Slave Dancer, The Dark is Rising, Anne of Green Gables, The Witch of Blackbird Pond, Mystery of the Witches' Bridge and Locked in Time were discussed in relation to independent reading selection. Two titles which were removed from the final list were frequently mentioned as popular with student readers: Stephen King's Eyes of the Dragon and Welwyn Wilton Katz's False Face.

A number of the teachers in my study had been involved with piloting and field-testing novels for Alberta Education's list. A few mentioned they liked the variety of novels on the list and that students particularly enjoyed the realistic fiction about teenagers their own age. Teachers selecting novels for whole class novel study often felt more secure choosing a novel from an approved list, and were happy to have this updated one.

Teachers who were choosing a wider range of novels for group reading often felt the list of titles was too limited and they tended to go beyond these recommendations in selecting books they had read over the years that were award winners or that had been recommended by other teachers and resource people in their district.

Two teachers disliked the fact that titles were divided into grade levels: one stressed that many of her grade seven students had enjoyed books recommended for grade nine; the other commented that trying to divide book titles into grades was unfeasible because of the range of reading abilities and interests in all junior high classes. Two teachers thought there were too many books on the list that dealt with children escaping from Russia; other teachers commented on the preponderance of American authors and would have preferred more Canadian or international authors.

Teachers doing reading workshop allowed students far more freedom in choosing their own books to read but used the novel list as a resource for books to recommend:

> I let them choose their own novels. Kids who choose books from the list are generally good readers; some won't choose one just because it is recommended. There are lots of other good books too and some excellent current ones that aren't on the list.

In one rural school the teacher mentioned cost of books being a limiting factor: she had ordered sets of five of all the paperbacks on the list. A number of the books are available only in hardcover:

> The grade nines read The Pigman, The Outsiders and Winners because we have those books already and can't afford to buy sets of new books. I love Kashka and would like to order multiple copies but it's in hardcover and too expensive.

The book mentioned by nine of the eighteen teachers as most popular with students was S.E. Hinton's The Outsiders written in 1967. This book ranked highest in popularity in a 1974 survey of young adult reading in the Los Angeles Public Library (Varlejs, 1978) and was ranked fourth in recommendations by students in the 1988 Edmonton reading survey. (Stacey, 1988) It topped the list of novel sets borrowed by teachers in that district in 1987-1988, and five of the teachers I interviewed had used it for whole class novel study in 1990-1991. Hinton's book deals with the violence of street gangs in a community divided by wealth and poverty and Robert Probst (1988) suggests that:

> In most adolescent fiction dealing with violence, the central characters are themselves adolescents, and the issues raised are likely to be significant for adolescent readers. (p. 128)

One teacher in my study commented

> I'm surprised The Outsiders is not on the new list as it's so successful with kids. It's her best book.... I don't like her new one. The Outsiders is a strong novel of identity and the kids can relate to it; strong characterization is important at this level. The language is not difficult and it allows

> for good discussion of stereotyping, labelling and survival- the same issues kids are facing today. There are often few parents around and kids have to learn to fend for themselves.

Another said

> We know from the past that students can identify with the characters and fall in love with one. They like the issues of risks and consequences dealt with in the book.

And a third

> Students love The Outsiders. They think it's the best book they've ever read and many name it as their top book.

A fourth endorsement

> We did The Outsiders with Grade eight. They love the book...even the non-readers love it.

Ten other titles selected by teachers for whole class or small group study were from a recommended list in Alberta Education's 1978 Junior High Language Arts Curriculum Guide. Of these only Smith by Leon Garfield is common to both lists. The Cay appears to have retained most popularity with teachers as it was mentioned by five teachers; four teachers still favoured Paul Zindel's The Pigman, three mentioned Madeleine L'Engle's A Wrinkle in Time and Agatha Christie's And Then There Were None. Other titles mentioned from the 1978 curriculum guide were Farley Mowat's Lost in the Barrens and Owls in the Family, Robert Lipsyte's The Contender, Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, Glendon Swarthout's Bless the Beasts and the Children and Jack Shaefer's Shane.

SUMMARY

These eight themes which emerged from my interview data reflect a number of common concerns by teachers about their students' reading interests and abilities. Most teachers expressed a desire to relate the literature selected for reading in junior high classes to students' lives, through selecting books which focus on topics of teenage interest, or by allowing students some freedom of choice in novel selection. Some teachers felt constrained in their novel selection by limitations imposed by availability of books in their school, the need to choose novels for several classes collaboratively with other teachers, or restrictions imposed by their own familiarity with current young adult fiction.

Teachers in larger school districts stressed the value of resources provided by their boards in helping with choice of books; teachers in smaller districts relied more heavily on their librarian's advice or on their own initiative in selecting books they had read and enjoyed. Nearly all the teachers in my study were making use of recommended lists from Alberta Education for novel selection. In some cases, books from the 1990 list were extensively read in class; in other classrooms, novels from the 1978 curriculum guide were still being taught and recommended. Teachers using a reading workshop approach provided the widest range of novel selection, with students reading books from a variety of recommended lists and a broad selection of novels of their own choice, ranging from current best-sellers to long-established literary classics.

While professional development was not specifically mentioned in the interview questions, it was frequently discussed by teachers in the study as an important element in promoting change in their criteria for novel selections and in helping them to develop new teaching strategies in their classrooms.

CHAPTER FOUR

APPROACHES FOR TEACHING NOVELS

Teachers in my study approached novel teaching in a variety of ways; in many instances teachers chose to combine a number of different teaching strategies within one classroom, offering students both communal experiences in reading the same novel and allowing them to read different novels independently for part of the year. In some classrooms teachers structured their literature programs around more traditional class reading and discussion of one or more novels; in others, teachers changed both the traditional format and selection of novels by restructuring their language arts classes into a reading workshop.

Following the three approaches to novel teaching suggested by D.W. Harding which formed part of my interview questions, I have categorized my data around whole class novel studies, small group reading and independent reading. Echoes of these approaches have surfaced in the emergent themes, but each approach has unique characteristics and concerns which merit consideration.

WHOLE CLASS APPROACH

Four teachers in my study chose to do only whole class novel studies in 1990/1991. Three of these teachers did two novel studies per grade during the year, with whole class and small group discussions and a variety of projects and written assignments at the end. Pre-teaching strategies included introducing the novel with a short story or poem relating to the theme of the book, discussing relevant personal experiences, giving notes on pertinent literary terminology and occasionally showing the movie of the book.

In most cases teachers read the start of the book aloud to students who were responsible for completing it at home and responding to questions in class. These ranged from convergent comprehension questions on the text to more divergent ones relating to students' personal experience. One teacher explained:

> I like to give them open-ended questions not summary ones. I want to challenge them to feel and think. I ask them 'How would you feel if this happened to you?' 'What would you do?' I tell them to stop while they're reading and predict what will happen. I ask kids to share personal experiences related to the book, and I do the same.... I ask them to write different endings and epilogues.

The fourth teacher chose to read one full-length novel with her grade eight classes, but she varied the novel and her teaching strategies according to the interests and abilities her classes. In one class a boy's father had recently died and for this reason she avoided reading Mama's Going to Buy You a Mockingbird with those students. In her class which was reading The Hobbit, she allowed students to do group projects for the first time and was pleased with the results:

> They made their own newspaper in groups. I selected the groups to ensure there were some strong students in each. I was amazed at how creative they were. I gave them a group mark plus an individual mark for one hard news story each member wrote... Next year I think I'll use three books in all classes and let them choose one and read in groups.

She also shared her innovative pre-reading strategy with the novel Waiting For The Rain which explores the relationship between a black and white boy in South Africa:

> I introduced the novel by starting with a new seating plan - without telling them why - I put all the blue eyed kids in one section and gave them pop and chips. I put the brown eyed kids together and was really mean to them. They got so angry. I made them get together in groups to try to find out how they were different and why I treated them differently. This gave them a first hand appreciation of the racism dealt with in the book.

Nine of the teachers incorporated at least one whole class study into their program in addition to small group or independent reading. Many of them felt this provided an opportunity to read and discuss a novel students would otherwise not choose to read:

> I see part of my job as extending and exposing them to books they wouldn't have read themselves. I did Angel Square with grade seven at the start of the year.... It's both funny and serious and introduces them to other Brian Doyle books. It's an easy reading level and a quick read but has many interesting facets and connections: multiculturalism, handicapped people, role models, heroes, prejudice. We discuss all these and the violence in the book. They do response journals that they write in class. It gives me a chance to get to know them through their writing.

Another teacher also started the school year with a whole class novel study for her grade eight classes before moving on to independent reading. She chose Cynthia Voigt's Homecoming, which is the first in a series on the Tillerman family. She commented on the problem of finding one novel to appeal to a wide range of readers and coping with students who had already read the book:

> This is the second year we've used this novel. We bought it last year because it was on the grade eight list and a library aide recommended it. I like it too. The main characters are kids of both sexes with different views of the world that students can relate to. It worked well in class...at least with one class it did...a few of the good readers found it boring. Two students had already read this book so I let them choose another book from the series and work together as a group. At the end they did book talks on their novel to all classes; this really helped to create interest in the rest of the series.

For a pre-reading strategy she asked students to imagine themselves going home after school to find themselves locked out and their family gone and to imagine what they would do and how they would cope. Students read most of the novel at home and worked in reading groups at school on creating a mind map of the children's journey, acting out scenes and responding to some content questions. They worked individually on a written assignment based on characters in the book and were tested on their knowledge of the text at the end of the two-month unit. Although the teacher felt this novel had been a moderate success with most students, she planned to give students more choice of novels the following year.

Of these thirteen teachers in my study who did some form of whole class novel study, eleven incorporated small group discussions or small group project activities as part of students' response to the literature; four of these teachers also used response journals with their students.

Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) discuss the advantages of whole class novel studies:

> Having read books in common builds the language community of the classroom and can provide a touchstone for experiences for the rest of the year. Students can add to each other's knowledge and perceptions by sharing in discussions, projects, and writing over a period of time. Whole class books also help balance what students would read on their own.... More challenging books that deal with philosophical or moral issues are...books that students may need a nudge to read. Whole class teaching provides an opportunity for the teacher to give that nudge and also creates ways for students to get involved with the novel on many levels. (p. 168)

They recommend small group discussions and activities with a common text which can be shared with the rest of the class at the end as well as journal writing in response logs for students to explore their own responses to the novel and prepare for class discussions.

Benton and Fox (1985) discuss the value of the reading journal:

> The reading journal is perhaps the most flexible and useful proposal.... Readers are provided with notebooks in which they respond in any way they choose to a novel, including speculations about how the story will develop, judgements, comparisons with their own experience, illustrations of characters, reflections on moments or themes from the book, comments on how the author is telling the

> story and notes about their own experiences prompted by the book. Most pupils need help to get started on this kind of subjective, exploratory writing; for some it will be refreshingly new, others need to 'unlearn'the more objective mode of the book report.
> (p.121)

Tchudi and Mitchell also elaborate on some problems and concerns with a whole class approach to novels:

> If the teacher assumes the role of lecturer or critic, the whole class approach can be deadly dull. There is a danger of what we call "the plod approach," the chapter-by-chapter, day-by-day, week-after-week stretching out of a book. (p.168).... The use of literature as a common class experience calls for careful selection of books.... It's important to recall that even though a title may appear on a great books list, unless it snares the vast majority of students in your class, you will likely fall into the plod approach and wind up having to "beat a dead horse" as well. (p. 169)

Protherough makes suggestions about choosing novels for whole class study:

> In a class with the full range of ability, some work may be too difficult or sophisticated in a literary sense, even with editing, to enable the pupils to share the experience of reading together.... Some books provide an enjoyable group experience, something which can be shared and discussed. Others are inherently more personal and better suited to private reading. (p. 154)

He also comments on the reading pace and expectations for whole class reading:

> There are significant differences between what happens when children read for themselves and what generally happens when a teacher organizes that reading in class. In a lesson, the pace of reading is controlled, it may well be interrupted by questions and comments, and once the reading is over certain responses are likely to be demanded from the readers. (p. 180)

His suggestions for reading strategies in these situations parallel those of Tchudi and Mitchell: pre-reading activities, a first reading of the text with individual responses encouraged, followed by shared and developing responses which may include concentration on the story-line, the novel's viewpoint, the characters, language, style and form of the novel, and finally a summarizing of responses including evaluation and assessment of the novel and a presentation or sharing of activities based on the book. He cautions that all students will approach the text with their own point of view and expectations:

> The problem for the teacher is how to take into account what children bring *to* a book, as well as what they get *out* of it. How can a lesson accommodate these different intentions and expectations which will dominate the responses of two dozen assorted young readers? (p. 181)

Whole class novel studies have the advantage of providing students with a communal class reading experience and the opportunity to explore a novel on many levels. They present problems for the teacher in choosing literature which will engage a majority of student readers who have different interests and reading abilities. Whole class studies also challenge the teacher to maintain student interest through a variety of teaching strategies and activities.

SMALL GROUP READING

A number of teachers in the study indicated that a possible solution to the problems inherent in whole class novel study is to offer students a choice of novels to read and respond to in small groups. Teachers have structured this group reading in a variety of ways. One teacher I interviewed has been combining a grade nine small group reading program with independent reading for the past five years. She told me she reads young adult books every summer to find "books of substance" to present to students. For the group reading she selects five novels. For this past school year she chose The Westing Game, And Then There Were None, Westmark, And You Give me a Pain, Elaine, and Smith. She explained:

> I have five groups working on different novels. In this way they can usually find a book that appeals to them. When only I have the opportunity to choose the book for everyone to read, many of the non-readers find it doesn't appeal to them. This way they're more interested in reading the book as they've been involved in the selection. I try to get as many copies of each book as I can so that students get their first or second choice.

She explained that sometimes she will give a student a second choice to help group distribution, either by providing a strong leader for a group or splitting up potential problem students. It is obvious that much time and planning has gone into organizing this group reading:

> They get about four weeks to work on their book. I schedule times for independent reading and times for group work. They do individual response journals too, make predictions about what will happen and comment on the book, and I respond to them. Every few days I ask them to do summaries of chapters and give them questions about their book which they discuss in their groups. They are responsible for evaluating each other in the group on these. They have to look for literary allusions and do a character study which I evaluate. They have a choice of projects to do on their novel

> which they present at the end.... I find this group work is effective in putting pressure on weaker students to keep up with the reading and discussions.

From her current reading of novels on the junior high reading list she has plans to incorporate several newer novels such as On the Edge into her 1991 group selection.

A teacher in another school district chose a number of novels from Alberta Education's list and gave book talks on them to her grade nine students. They could then choose one to read and discuss in a group. She told me:

> This year students chose Homecoming, Smith, Beauty and Tom's Midnight Garden. They did a four to six week study of these novels. They read their novel and wrote responses after a number of pages in their journals. They discussed the novels in their groups and made predictions about what would happen. I tried to evaluate their discussions but it was too hard to do.... They had a group assignment which ranged from acting out a scene to making a videotape and they really enjoyed these. They had different individual written assignments: some did character sketches, some wrote a sequel or a different ending to the novel.

The teacher felt this had been a successful group project.(Appendix 4) With a less academic grade nine class she modified her choices by suggesting students read Magic Kingdom For Sale\Sold, The Eyes of the Dragon, a novel from the junior high list or an approved own choice. Students wrote response journals and had a choice of a final written assignment. (Appendix 5)

Another way teachers structured group reading was to begin with a whole class study of one novel and give students choices of a related novel to read in groups. One teacher read

Dragonslayer with her grade seven class in a mythology unit and discussed how mythology affects both fantasy and science fiction. She then gave them a choice of reading either a science fiction novel, Wolf of Shadows, or the fantasy novel A Wrinkle in Time:

> They are very different books. Many of the boys and some of the weaker readers chose Wolf of Shadows which is shorter and more of a nature book. More girls chose A Wrinkle in Time which is longer, but some of the boys liked it too.... They did different group activities on the books and shared their projects with the others at the end. This went well as students were curious about what they'd missed by choosing one book over the other.

A fourth teacher organized his entire language arts program for grades seven and nine around group reading of novels. He explained that he used to spend months "boring students with one novel" as part of a thematic unit; now his students selected novels to read in groups every month and were proud of the number of books they had read and enjoyed each year. He feels students learn through creativity and allowing their own ideas to develop. As their teacher he is interested in their world and encouraging them to find novels they enjoy reading.

At the start of the year he limited their selections to around ten novels with multiple copies of each book available in his classroom. Novel titles that he mentioned for his grade sevens include The Cay, Underground to Canada, Days of Terror, The Outsiders, My Side of the Mountain, The Keeper of the Isis Light, A Wrinkle in Time, The Great Gilly Hopkins, Beauty, Owls in the Family, Words By Heart, The Incredible Journey and I am David. For Grade nine he recommended Waiting for the Rain , The Pigman, And Then There Were None, Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry, The Dog Who Wouldn't Be, Magic Kingdom for Sale\Sold, On the Edge, The Contender and Shane. He explained how his program was organized:

> Students choose a book and form a group. After two weeks they must have read the book at home; I check their reading and understanding by asking them to write a brief report on it. They also use journals to respond to the novel as they read it. Their time in class is spent mainly in their sharing circle where they discuss the novel and work on a collaborative project in various media: writing letters or diaries, making illustrations, dramatizing a scene, interviewing the author or even making a video.... Each group presents their projects to the rest of the class. This gives them practice in public speaking and allows them to hear other people's opinions and ideas. It's important for them to see that different opinions are acceptable.

He felt his students responded very positively to choosing novels themselves and responding in groups. He stressed the need for the teacher to be flexible, both in helping students choose novels and in encouraging their response. Later in the year he allowed students to choose from a wider range of novels and bring in their own suggestions. For those students whose projects were completed early he had a variety of extension activities ready. For example, one of his students wrote a play based on the novel he had just completed. He cautioned that group work takes more time to oraganize but felt that one of the important advantages of this program is the integration of reading and writing in a "real context" where students are reading for pleasure and writing for a wider audience than just the teacher.

In a comparison of single text and multitext approaches to literature teaching, Riley and Schaeffer (1979) note the advantages of small group reading:

> The problem of different levels of ability within a classroom can be addressed through content as well as activities...participation in selection can be broad based...group members become familiar with a wide range of varied books...reading for pleasure and out of interest can be encouraged...reading interests of the group may be expanded through variety of materials available and through use of peer recommendations. (p. 29)

Tchudi and Mitchell (1989) recommend the need for some structuring of time spent by students in reading their novels and discussing them in groups, as well as organization of group activities to help students find a sense of direction in their reading and response. They suggest record keeping and documentation of student learning for evaluation may also be a dominant initial concern in setting up a multitext reading program, but once routines are established this should be no more difficult than in a whole class approach. (pp.172-178)

Students interviewed about their reading in school during Jack Thomson's extensive Australian survey repeatedly requested greater freedom in choosing novels to read in class:

> 'We should read more books we enjoy instead of the books our English teacher gives us to read in English.'

> 'The standard of school novels is really pathetic. They are totally boring and unreadable.' (1987, p. 24)

Thomson observes that these comments by students

> highlight the need for negotiation between teachers and pupils over choice of texts, for the organization of small sets of texts in classrooms so that groups of pupils can each work on different texts at the same time, and for a wide-reading programme. (p. 25)

He also emphasizes the importance of reading in small groups:

> Reading, which is initially a private activity, can become far more enjoyable and profitable when responses are shared so that a community of readers is established in the classroom, a situation which is itself conducive for the further dissemination of the reading habit. (pp. 268-9)

INDEPENDENT READING

Rather than offering students a limited selection of novels to read as a class or in groups, individualized reading programs allow students freedom to choose individual books to read. Teachers have organized this independent reading in various ways.

Thirteen of the eighteen teachers in my study had a form of independent reading incorporated into their program. Two teachers had independent reading once a week with free choice of novels from the library, from a selection in the classroom or from home; in one case students selected a number of novels to read and wrote an essay on one of their books. In the other classroom students listened to music as they read and gave book talks or discussed their novel with others in a small group setting. This teacher stressed that independent reading was an important component of her language arts program because of the great variation in her students' reading abilities. She explained:

> I've had so many weak readers these past two years. Some students are barely literate, while a few read at university level. I need to offer them a variety of novels.... I would never go back to forcing them to read only one novel that I choose.

One teacher organized an "individual leisure reading component" throughout the year with students choosing five novels a year to read followed by a self-selected project on each book. Two other teachers organized independent reading as one unit of their language arts program: students in one of these schools had a month to read their book and complete a response journal; in the other school students selected a novel for a book talk with the help of the librarian and had one reading period per week for six weeks to read their novel, write a response journal and prepare a talk. (Appendix 6) Their teacher explained that

> the librarian helped them to make decisions by giving book talks on some Canadian award-winning novels and several classics. We also had some authors visit the school this year and this helped to prompt students to choose their books. I didn't limit their selection however. There's a great variety in the titles. The Hobbit is always popular. Even Silence of the Lambs is there. It has some gruesome scenes but the boy who chose it is an excellent reader and his parents approve.

Eight of the teachers had established an Atwell-style reading workshop as the basis for their literature program. Nancie Atwell's reading workshop invites students' active involvement as readers of other people's writing. Her priorities in setting up the workshop are to encourage fluency, involvement, appreciation and initiative in student readers through allowing them to exert ownership over their reading by choosing their own books, providing in-class time for silent, independent reading and ensuring collaboration with the teacher and their peers in their selection and response to books. In this way Atwell believes it is possible to create a "community of readers in action." (1987, p. 168)

Her reading workshop begins with a mini-lesson of five to ten minutes, during which the teacher talks about an author or a genre, reads and discusses a short story or poem, or focuses on an aspect of the reading process. The rest of the period is devoted to silent independent reading of a novel or writing responses to reading in a dialogue journal to which the teacher, or later in the year maybe a peer, will respond. At least one letter per week in the journal is required: Atwell models the kind of responses and questions about the literature that she expects students to write on an overhead at the start of the year. Students discuss what they've read, thought or felt about their novel and ask questions about the text; in her replies Atwell encourages them to go beyond plot summaries to analyze and evaluate what they have read and establish criteria for selecting novels. Students are asked to complete a reading survey at the start of the year and also keep a log sheet in their journals with a record of titles and authors they have read and the date completed.

Evaluation of the reading workshop is done collaboratively with students through a conference; grading is based on points for the workshop, on the quality of the journal and the degree of individual progress towards goals set early each quarter.

Atwell's workshop requires teachers to become a reading resource, helping each student to find appropriate reading material. This approach implies that teachers should have a good knowledge of both a wide range of young adult literature and a good understanding of each student's reading ability and interests. Atwell believes that independent reading works best when a selection of novels is available in a class library, enabling students to browse through books and change titles where appropriate; but teachers also need to be prepared to cope with students' own selections brought from home or the public library.

One teacher I interviewed who incorporated two periods per week of independent reading into her program thought students enjoyed reading at school and choosing their own books but thought many were stuck in the same kind of book most of the year and were still not reading much at home. She felt that students needed more response to their reading than she could offer in their journals. She planned to ask them to read within different genres next year, to allow students to write to each other and to talk about their books in small groups. Another teacher at the same school tried to push her students to read more widely within the workshop setting and asked them to read at least one "challenge" novel.

A teacher from another district allowed her grade seven and nine students to choose any book to read in the workshop except cartoons. Her students chose most of their novels from the school library with the help of the librarian, but problems arose when students wanted to take their books home during the holidays and the library policy demanded they be returned:

> I've struggled with the times kids should do their personal reading. I give them time in class but they need to be able to take their books home too. Some students read five books a week and write responses in their journals on the entire books; others hardly ever finish a book and they write responses as they read. I like to model responses by writing in their journals but it takes so much time. Later this year I let them choose a partner and write to each other and that took the pressure off me and they learned new things from each other.

She also encountered a dilemma in trying to push students to read more mature books:

> I bite my tongue over some of their selections like Sweet Valley High or Choose Your Own Adventure and other limited book choices, but after a while if they're only reading those books, I suggest another novel to them. I hate to judge their reading but I need to let them see there are other books out there. I try to recommend more mature reading - at some point they need to change. I'm not that patient or convinced they will suddenly change in high school. As a teacher I hate to see them miss all that good literature.... I don't dictate which genre they should read..... I do try not to dictate too much when I'm supposedly offering them freedom of choice. I have problems when they choose books that are poorly written; it's my main concern.... Kids like a lot of the realistic fiction on the list; some love fantasy and others mystery books.

> Lots of girls like the Voigt books. Eyes of the Dragon is a popular book. Kids love V.C. Andrews' Flowers in the Attic series and I hate her books. They are sleazy and horrible with no redeeming features. I battle against this but I have to be careful as teachers read them too. I still see my job as helping students to move beyond that level.

Two teachers at rural schools were generally enthusiastic about their students' responses to reading workshop. One teacher felt this format gave students limited freedom to choose books and that she had the choice of moving them on to another genre to extend their reading.

> The Atwell book really inspired me. We talk a lot in class about books we like and share ideas. Students write in their journal every second day; they make predictions and say how the book is affecting them. The hardest thing was getting them to respond beyond a summary of the plot.... I do grade their journals although it's difficult to do.... The maturity level of my grade eight and nines really varies. That's why I like this program so much - it's a kind of enrichment for good students and a resource for weaker ones too. They can read two years behind their grade level but can do it in comfort. The big pay-off is that we are reaching all levels of kids.

The other teacher had a reading workshop well established in her school with her grade eights and nines. Being in a small school she knows the students personally and felt this was a help in suggesting books they would enjoy. Her students read during two of their eight language arts periods a week. She begins in grade eight to model and teach response to literature and lets them practise journal writing to friends for two months while she monitors their responses:

> I always let them choose a book of their own choice. Sometimes they choose a novel from the list but often they bring a book from home. If it's

> approved by their parents it's fine for them to read. I give them explicit instructions about their response journals and take it in three times. They have a month to six weeks to complete a project on their book. I give them a wide choice of projects and they can choose one of their own too.... They can read as many books as they like but they only do seven projects through the year.

In discussing the issue of helping students move beyond a limited selection of novels in their reading, she responded:

> I'm happy if they're reading at all. Many are from homes where no-one reads. Sometimes I can expand their reading, sometimes not. My aim is to turn them into lifelong readers. Some grade nines read at the grade six level but enjoy their book and do a great project.... I insist they choose literature to read not comics.I share books that I've read on the junior high list that I've enjoyed and some of them read these.... I feel really good about their reading in this workshop. Some of them respond only to fast action in their response journals - I try to help them see beyond this, to respond to characters and to the way the book is written. I notice some of their writing is showing a real awareness of the writer's craft; they are developing a sensitivity to poetic language through their reading and writing.

In contrast to the freedom of choice in reading selections offered by this teacher, another teacher from an urban school felt she needed to provide genre guidelines for novel selection in her reading workshop. Her grade seven and eight students were required to read a variety of genres and at least one classic per term; her criterion for time to read a book was two weeks, which often required at least thirty minutes per day reading at home in addition to the four class periods of reading time per week. She admitted this time frame was unfeasible for some students if their novel was too long or too hard. She also commented on her efforts to broaden students' reading interests:

> Students find it hard to decide what to read when they don't read much. I don't let them read Sweet Valley High , Babysitters Club or Nancy Drew. They get a copy of Alberta Education's list and can bring a book from home if they get a note from parents. Popular books go in cycles and they pass them around. They read lots of Stephen King books. Many like The Eyes of the Dragon. I gave them a list of all the classics in the library and encouraged them to try reading one. They weren't keen at first but many of them liked Treasure Island and some read David Copperfield in the paperback version. Some classics are too hard for them to understand and I try to help them in conferences. They didn't do projects this year, just half a page in their response journals. This really developed their critical faculties and their comprehension skyrocketed. They did very well on their grade exams - they were surprised as they thought they'd only been reading.

Another teacher commented on the need to provide lots of direction in writing response journals and the importance of modelling responses with students. She always tried to stretch students in their ability to respond to the literature by asking them questions about their reading and encouraging them to read different books:

> The problem is to let them develop their own reading tastes and at the same time to stretch them. I know some teachers have placed restrictions on their choice of novels. The worry is that some kids will never get beyond The Hardy Boys books. I found that by letting them begin with these, that through the response journal I could edge them on to other reading, for example, The Outsiders and then on to other Hinton books. In their reading surveys at the start of the year most kids indicated they were readers. They said what the teacher wanted to hear. Later through their response journals, they admitted this was the first time they had ever finished a novel themselves.

One teacher in my study structures his language arts program for grades seven, eight and nine entirely around a reading and writing workshop. His students spent approximately four weeks on a reading workshop with up to eighty minutes a day of reading time, followed by a writing workshop and oral sharing and back to reading workshop. He chose to do the reading workshop every day for a block of time rather than intersperse it with writing workshop as Atwell suggests, because he felt students like to keep on with their reading once they are into a book. For this same reason he felt the school-wide programs of silent reading, such as U.S.S.R, were of limited value as ten minutes is not enough time to read: students get involved in a book and then abruptly have to leave it. He was very positive about students' reading experiences in his workshop, with even the most reluctant readers finding a book to interest them, and felt that students need time at school to read; but he expressed concern that only the good readers continued to read during the other workshop sessions.

His classroom had a selection of young adult novels on racks for his students to select in addition to novels available through the school library. He stressed the need to provide students with ready access to a large number of books and brought his own books to supplement his classroom library. Students could also bring books from home provided their parents approved.

He explained the importance of the mini-lesson at the start of class to broaden students' reading repertoire and help them learn new reading stategies. He encouraged students to read a minimum of two books during each workshop:

> Some students read nine or ten books, others struggle to read one. They read in class and write in their journals. I respond at least three times to help them get beyond plot summaries. After this they can choose to write to a peer. I do need to model responses with them, and many of them develop real insights into their reading. They also learn by reading how others respond to novels when they write to each other. At the end they hand in their journals with a list of books read and I have a personal conference with each student on what they've read and how they're doing with their responses. We decide on a grade collaboratively from a ten point descriptor. (Appendix 7) With the grade sevens I don't have the conference but they have extra time to work on projects. All grades do a project with a wide range of choices on a book which they present to the rest of the class.

He is encouraged by students' obvious enjoyment of being able to choose their own books and read in class:

> The kids like the independent reading much better than whole class study. There's a real range of reading interests and abilities. One group, mainly boys, is dedicated fantasy readers; other students love mystery books, particularly Joan L. Nixon and Lois Lowry. Some classics like Jane Eyre and Gone with the Wind get passed around. Stephen King and V.C. Andrews are the most widely read. My students have a much more positive attitude to reading at the end of the year and that's important.

This teacher was happy with students writing to peers in their response journals and felt they responded more naturally to each other. Another teacher doing reading workshop felt that the level of students' language deteriorated when they wrote to peers and that they needed the extension in response she could provide. Generally teachers compromised by responding to student journals themselves for part of the year and allowing students to write to each other for the latter part of the school year.

Tchudi and Mitchell explain that individualized reading programs have only became popular since the 1960's with the paperback revolution making quality literature available inexpensively. (p. 175) They point out the need to develop some sort of management procedures to record student progress and some structure to make the program work. They suggest that simply assigning students book reports to do after their reading will not produce avid readers. The reading needs to be made an integral part of the class and involve some sharing of responses with the teacher and other students in the class. (p. 178)

Jack Thomson (1987) stresses the need to allow students to read widely and also to encourage the development and articulation of their responses to books:

> Wide reading and close reading should go hand in hand in English. Without a wide-reading scheme in the school, the reading habit is unlikely to be developed in all those students who haven't picked it up in their homes. Without attention to close reading in schools, to assist in the deepening and articulation of response, students' reading is unlikely to make optimal progress to higher levels and to more demanding books. (p. 243)

He suggests beginning the program by asking students to find one novel they would genuinely want to recommend to others and providing class time for uninterrupted private reading during which the teacher also reads or confers with students about their reading. He recommends that students keep logs to record their ratings of books and share books informally through brief talks in class. He warns that completing assignments on books may destroy the pleasure of reading by emphasizing the testing of information rather than the human concerns of literature. (p. 244)

He also advocates reading journals for the "informal, expressive, penalty-free writing in response to literature" which can "provide the space for the growth of a conversational relationship between the reader and the text." (p. 253) The teacher becomes the trusted adult who reads and replies but does not evaluate, and in this way encourages students to explore their own reading and learning processes.

Nancie Atwell's reading workshop appears to be a strong influence in persuading North American teachers to introduce an individualized reading program into their junior high classroom.

John Willinsky (1990) suggests that the growing popularity of Nancie Atwell's reading and writing workshops is a result of the organization of her workshop and the psycho-ethical basis of her idea, that "this is how students naturally learn and live." (p. 51) He writes:

> Atwell is not afraid to deal with the institutional questions of time and motion management. What has developed into the structuring of the daily hour-long workshop becomes a wholesome compromise with the nature of schooling and its need to organize time.... She makes the case that this is indeed an

> engaging and workable recasting of possibilities in pursuit of a literate goal.... Atwell offers long lists of skills, goals and questions that constitute her program coverage; she illuminates her work with strong examples of the students' and her own writing.... She bolsters her case by citing increases in the test scores and the number of titles read by her workshopping students. (p. 51)

All these writers comment on the need for the teacher to accept a new role in an individualized reading program. Tchudi and Mitchell consider the teacher both a reading resource, helping each student to find appropriate reading material, and a reading propagandist, promoting books, reviewing books and sharing responses. (p. 180) Thomson sees the role of the teacher as a guide, helping students to move through developmental stages in their reading, and creating contexts for genuine responses to literature:

> They are the teachers who will know when to intervene to assist individual students and when to desist from intervention. They will not impose texts or interpretations on students, but neither will they leave the development of higher level strategies to chance. They will also recognise most clearly that the readers in any class are likely to be at different stages of development, and that each student will need individual consideration as well as frequent experience of working cooperatively with others on shared texts. (p. 230)

Willinsky sees individualized reading programs creating shifting roles for teacher and student, with students being offered a new level of responsibility:

> The New Literacy gives the teacher of reading a different role than director of meaning or program technician....Reading becomes the experience of discovery, of uncovering this range of meaning in the text and relating of this meaning to others. The teacher can help the student expand the range

> of meanings by sharing and discussing the reading experiences with students and opening new vistas in the variety of sources to which the student can turn. (p. 72)

Teachers who introduce independent reading programs into their classrooms move from trying to "teach" a novel by describing and analyzing the experience of reading a text, to providing students with practice in the experience of reading a variety of texts for themselves and helping them to learn how to respond to the books with increasing levels of maturity.

SUMMARY

Teachers in my study had differing views on the best way to organize a literature program for junior high students. A small number were happy with the traditional format of presenting one or two novels for all students in their classroom to read and discuss in a whole class setting. Ten of the eighteen teachers combined two or three of the suggested approaches.

Teachers doing whole class novel studies stressed the values of communal response to the books and the benefits of enrichment and enculturation of students. Their concerns focused firstly on choosing a small number of novels that were of literary merit and appealed to a majority of students in their classes, and secondly on organizing ways for students to respond to the literature.

Five of the teachers organized small group study of novels. Two of these teachers offered students limited choices of books as one unit of their language arts program; the other three teachers set up a wider range of novel selection with students reading and responding in small groups and writing response journals. They felt multitext approaches addressed the problem of different ability levels within the classroom and offered students more personal choice of reading matter. Teachers were aware that these approaches may be more demanding for the teacher in requiring familiarity with a wider range of literature and in providing a sense of direction to each group.

Thirteen teachers incorporated independent reading into their programs: three of these teachers had re-organized their entire language arts classroom into an Atwell-type workshop, while five others used the workshop as the main component of their literature program. These teachers were unanimous in the belief that students like to choose their own books to read and to have time to read in school. They felt that students who previously hated reading were able to find books that interested them and were being encouraged to read with more enjoyment.

Concerns were expressed over students' choices of books which did not always qualify as "good literature". Teachers set different limitations and expectations on students' choices. Some were happy to see students reading any novel with interest and enjoyment, provided parental approval was given. Other teachers limited choices of formula fiction and set criteria for reading a variety of genres. Providing students with a range and variety of books to select from was also a concern; most teachers felt an in-class library was the ideal, but not always feasible with limited school budgets. Students were encouraged to use the school and public libraries and bring books from home.

Teachers who organized an Atwell-style reading workshop felt her model provided a good grounding for setting up a totally individualized reading program, but many of them had adapted her ideas to suit their personal preferences and their school context.

There was little overall consensus among teachers in the study that there is one approach to literature teaching in junior high schools that is superior to all others. Many teachers incorporated a variety of approaches which they felt would address diverse student interests and abilities. All teachers were interested in developing teaching strategies that would help students to enjoy reading novels and to respond to the literature in increasingly insightful ways.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF IMPLICATIONS AND IDEAS FOR THE FUTURE

My study has been a limited one in respect to the number of teachers interviewed and selection of teachers: many of the participants were recommended to me as language arts teachers who are incorporating innovative and creative ideas into their teaching. Findings from this study cannot, therefore, be generalizable for all junior high language arts teachers in the province. The teachers do, however, represent a number of different school boards and classrooms in the province and their ideas are reflective of teachers in schools of different sizes and with a range of student populations.

In pursuing this study I hoped to gain understanding of how and why teachers incorporated the reading of literature into their junior high language arts classrooms. Through my discussions with the eighteen teachers, I have learned a great deal about the variety and complexity in teachers' selection and use of fiction in their classrooms. No two teachers chose literature for identical reasons. No two teachers used the same approach to teaching the literature in quite the same way or with identical strategies for encouraging students' responses. At best I can reflect on the variety of reasons for novel selection and teaching strategies and make hypotheses about their meaning and implications for students in Alberta junior high language arts classrooms today and in the near future.

WHAT DO TEACHERS THINK READING IS FOR?

Teachers' choice of fiction to read with their students or to offer them for independent reading is linked to their views of what reading is *for*. Protherough suggests these reasons fall into three main groups: personal, curricular and literary. Most teachers in my study were concerned that students read novels for personal reasons of enjoyment and pleasure. Implicit in teachers' concern over students' poor reading habits and frequent television viewing was the notion that reading develops the imagination and helps personal development and understanding of both self and others. Teachers stressed the benefits of reading aloud to students to help their enjoyment and understanding of the novels and to encourage them to read more themselves. Many teachers emphasized the need to choose novels such as The Outsiders, The Pigman and Homecoming with situations that students could relate to their lives and characters students could identify with. Teachers using multitext approaches of small group reading or independent reading most strongly favoured the personal functions of reading; they stressed the need to encourage students to read with enjoyment in order to help them to become lifelong readers.

Teachers selecting whole class novel studies for their students often chose books which emphasized the curricular functions of literature. Novels such as The Cay, I am David, Lost in the Barrens, The Pearl, Angel Square, Waiting for the Rain, The Keeper of the Isis Light or Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde were chosen partly as a basis for discussing relevant issues of prejudice, greed, isolation, good and evil or coming-of-age. Such novels were seen as enhancing students' language and creative written work and relating to discussion of themes and topics which carried over into other subjects. This curricular function was most in evidence in novel selections which related to social studies, such as The Wild Children or Animal Farm.

Novel selection was also linked to helping students become discriminating readers and deepen their literary appreciation. The novel Smith, which was recommended in both the 1978 curriculum guide and Alberta Education's 1990 list, was frequently selected for its "literary" qualities, as a link to Dickens' novels and as a good preparation for more in-depth literature studies in high school. On the Edge, the psychological thriller written by the award-winning British writer Gillian Cross was a popular new selection by teachers and recommended for its complexity of plot and richness of language. Teachers choosing this novel and other books such as Cormier's I am the Cheese were aware that some students might become frustrated and confused by the books, and tried to incorporate teaching strategies to help students' understanding and appreciation of the novels.

Teachers choosing classics such as The Hound of the Baskervilles and Animal Farm for whole class studies stressed the literary quality of these books. A number of teachers with individualized reading programs also encouraged students to move on to novels with perceived literary merit; and in one instance, the teacher made selection of one literary classic a requirement of her program. Teachers with reading workshops often were concerned about the poor literary quality of students' choices and the predominance of formula fiction. V.C. Andrews, a writer frequently mentioned as popular reading among teenage girls, was condemned by several librarians and one of the teachers in my study as "sleazy and horrible." This view of one of the most popular authors among students is reinforced by Jack Thomson:

> Flowers in the Attic has nothing to do with art or life.... Young readers are very vulnerable to the emotional blandishments of this novel. They are blatantly deceived into hating the adults, weeping with and for the children and experiencing a guilt-induced prurient fascination in the perverted events portrayed in such a nastily suggestive manner. (p.60)

Allowing students to choose their own novels to read in class may create dilemmas for teachers in appearing to condone books of very limited literary and ethical value in the interests of encouraging students to become keen readers. Teachers in my study varied in their concern over this issue; many felt they were able to move students on to better quality literature through responding in journals and giving book talks on quality novels of high interest.

Protherough (1983) believes that most teachers attribute different comparative degrees of importance to the personal, curricular and literary functions of reading; and this suggestion is in keeping with the findings from my study. Most of the teachers agreed that students should primarily derive emotional pleasure from reading, develop positive attitudes towards reading, gain insight into their own lives and empathy for others. They generally considered that fostering students' language development and improving their writing abilities was a secondary benefit, along with increasing literary appreciation. These views are in contrast to the New Critical pedagogical focus on the literary product, common in literature teaching in schools until the last decade, which concentrated on identifying and evaluating the literary devices of a text. Although this New Critical approach was seldom recommended by teachers in my study, its continuing presence in junior high school is suggested by the comment made by one teacher whose colleague announced "I've taught them the theme of the book and now I'm giving them a test to see if they know it." A more comprehensive study of junior high school language arts teachers is necessary to explore how widespread this change in belief of the value of reading really is.

The number of teachers interviewed who stressed the importance of in-class reading time suggests an encouraging trend which contrasts with John Goodlad's extensive 1984 study of American schools. Goodlad found:

> The state of reading in the classrooms we observed seemed quite dismal. Exclusive of the common practice of students taking turns reading orally from a common text, reading occupied about 6% of class time at the elementary level and then dropped off to 3% and 2% for junior and senior highs, respectively. (pp. 106-107)

These teachers in my study favoured promoting reading for enjoyment in school and believed that encouraging students to read in class would help them to become lifelong readers.

WHICH BOOKS SHOULD BE CHOSEN?

Teachers in my study gave a variety of reasons for selecting books to read with their students. In many cases teachers chose books they had read and enjoyed themselves and which they felt would be of interest to students; in most cases these were award-winning young adult novels or books from recommended lists. There was general agreement that a majority of junior high students responded most positively to young adult fiction with adolescent protagonists. An exception was the group of devoted fantasy readers, predominantly boys, in every classroom who often read the entire series of all popular fantasy fiction.

All teachers acknowledged that junior high students vary considerably in their reading abilities and interests; but those doing predominantly whole class novel studies considered it unfortunate but inevitable that some students would be bored or overly challenged by any choice of class novel, and that some students would already have read the book. One of these teachers made special provision for students who had read the class novel by allowing them to read a different book in the series. Teachers using multitext approaches were very aware of these different reading levels and interests and structured their programs to accommodate these individual variations.

Teachers doing class novel studies and several with small group reading programs preferred to choose novels from lists authorized by Alberta Education. In some instances these novels were the ones authorized thirteen years ago. In many cases teachers chose these same books because they believed the novels' popularity among students was undiminished. Stacey's 1988 reading survey in which numerous students expressed dislike of one particular class novel may indicate this is not necessarily accurate. Another possible reason is that the schools' stockrooms were well furnished with these novels and teachers were encouraged or contented to use the same books year after year.

Alberta Education's 1990 list of novels was well represented in novel selections for both whole class reading, small group reading and independent reading. A number of teachers felt that the novel selection offered on the list was too limited. With the growing trend towards individualized reading programs, a wider selection of novel titles would be well received by teachers. Findings from Stacey's Edmonton reading survey (1988) suggest that mystery and adventure novels are popular with junior high students of both sexes, and that a greater variety of recommended books in these categories would help teachers in their novel selections for students.

Protherough (1983) suggests that

> Busy teachers find it difficult to give enough time to assessing books and that they feel they have been inadequately trained in the principles involved.
> (p. 148)

This study suggests that teachers who read little young adult fiction themselves rely heavily on authorized lists for novel selection and are less willing to try wide reading programs in their classrooms. Teachers who have incorporated group or independent reading in their programs are more conscious of the need to read widely and keep up to date with new young adult fiction and are able to go beyond authorized novel titles to personal and student favourites.

Teachers today have more freedom in selection of fiction than our counterparts forty years ago. There is no longer a common conviction about which books should be part of the language arts curriculum in junior high schools. The explosion of quality young adult fiction and the accessibility and lower costs of paperback novels have greatly broadened the possibilities for student reading. In view of these factors it is surprising that there was so much consensus about novel selection between teachers in my study. This consensus may in part be the result of collaboration and recommendations among teachers in a particular school or district about their novel selections and in part the reliance on novel titles from authorized lists.

WHAT ARE TEACHERS' ROLES IN STUDENT READING AND RESPONSE?

Selection of fiction and related teaching strategies are largely influenced by the perceived role of the teacher in the classroom. Teachers interviewed varied in the measure of control and freedom they desired in the classroom. Mostly teachers felt a responsibility to present quality literature to their students and to organize strategies that would allow students to respond to the novels individually and collaboratively.

As experienced novel readers ourselves, we teachers find many novels pleasurable to read and are familiar with conventional ways of describing and analyzing them. It is tempting to try to transfer our enjoyment and enthusiasm to students in an effort to help them to gain similar pleasure and understanding from a book. Like the teachers in Zancanella's 1991 study, we forget that reading a novel is not the acceptance of a ready-made objective text, but a personal transaction between reader and text, influenced by individual past experiences of language and of life. Every student will have a personal and individual experience reading a novel. Margaret Meek (1983) reminds us that

> 'What happens next?' is the curiosity that compels us all. The author's invitation to us to enter into the story...establishes a quasi-social relationship that all good readers understand and inexperienced readers scarcely glimpse. (p.56)

When students pick up a novel to read, they do so not in the expectation that they will learn something new or become more mature in the process, but with the hope that the novel will interest them and relate in some way to their lives. We need to encourage this hope by offering students imaginative fiction that they can enjoy. By imposing our own choices of fiction that we feel will improve students' literary knowledge or introduce them to important ideas, we risk conveying an unseen message:

> That serious literature can only be taken seriously, that books which reward analysis must be analysed, that reading for pleasure is inattentive reading, or reading of the trivial. (Hollindale, 1983, p. 99)

In a sense teachers cannot 'teach' a novel, but only provide contexts for students to read and respond to novels in individual ways. By asking students to summarize novels, answer comprehension questions about the text and use novels as a base for activities, we run the risk of losing sight of our original aim, "not to try to teach literature, but to try to teach a neglected, almost forgotten, skill - reading." (Protherough, 1983, p. 136)

Probst (1987) suggests that teachers who view reading as "an act of creation rather than a search for one true meaning" relinquish the traditional role of the teacher, and assume a new responsibilty: "to counsel...students through the difficult act of thinking." (p. 53) A number of teachers in my study were aware of this role change as they allowed students freedom to select novels, encouraged personal response through reading journals and organized communal response through small group discussions. In a number of cases teachers were not fully comfortable with this role change and expressed a desire for more control over students' novel choices and more structuring of students' responses in their journals.

Thomson believes English teachers need to start where their students are in their individual reading tastes and attitudes towards reading. By understanding the developmental sequences of reading and their characteristic strategies, teachers can guide students with appropriate individual suggestions for novel selection. Teachers can help students move from unreflective response to discovering more about themselves and their lives through reading and to an increasing awareness of literary strategies. He suggests this can only be attained through a wide reading program combined with individual response journals and collaborative activities where students can interrogate the text, reflect and elaborate on personal responses.

Several teachers indicated an awareness of this diversity in students' reading strategies and levels of response and considered an individualized reading program as an essential component in language arts in addressing students' individual needs. They envisioned their role in this program as a guide, leading students from their limited novel selection and response to an increasingly more mature reading level.

Nancie Atwell's reading workshop is based on students' active involvement in their own reading and writing. Teachers provide students with the opportunity to select literature, respond, search for the sources of the response, speculate about the author's intent and weigh the author's values and ideas against their own in a process of self-definition. In this workshop setting, teachers hand over a portion of their control of students' reading selection and response. It is evident from these interviews that not all teachers are willing or able to do so.

A parallel situation can be seen with writing. In a recent study of writing for learning in a grade eight classroom context, Bill Talbot (1988) suggests that teachers need to find a delicate balance in the structure we impose on learning so that students are able to develop their own intentions but are still encouraged to take risks with their writing. He discusses this difficult issue of trying to provide a writing context for students whose needs and abilities vary considerably:

> If there is not enough freedom, students may do the task but are unable to use it for their own intentions, which means they cannot use it for learning.... On the other hand, some students have trouble with too much freedom. They lack direction and don't know what to do. (p. 124)

Added to this dilemma is the problem of maintaining control, with some students seeing freedom as licence and causing problems for the rest of the class. These concerns are applicable also to individualized reading programs where teachers are trying to achieve a balance between offering students as much choice as possible in selecting their own literature and responding in individual ways, but are also aware of the need to limit some of students' choices, to nudge them on to new reading experiences and to provide structure for the ways in which students respond to their reading.

FINAL COMMENTS

My study provides insight into some of the common elements in novel selection and teaching strategies practised by teachers in Alberta; it also emphasizes the variety of reasons for choosing fiction and the diversity of strategies for encouraging student response to literature.

As Protherough suggests

> because response is so personal, the teaching style and interpretive stance that may best suit one student will not necessarily be congenial to another...there is no single teaching method for all teachers and all students. (p. 137)

It is encouraging that some teachers in Alberta are aware of the need to encourage junior high students to enjoy reading in light of the pessimistic responses to reading interest evidenced in Thomson's Australian study and Stacey's 1988 Edmonton reading survey. Further studies of a greater number of Alberta teachers and a longitudinal survey of junior high students' reading interests and preferences would enable teachers to structure novel selection and reading strategies in even more fruitful ways for their students.

Literature, as Margaret Meek (1991) reminds us, can bring everyone a fuller enjoyment of life. The books we call literature deeply enrich our understanding of ourselves, of others and of our world. As language arts teachers we share Meek's love and enjoyment of literature; our aim in the classroom is to encourage our students to enjoy the same richness and pleasure we gain from reading.

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APPENDIX 1

RESEARCH PROPOSAL DESCRIPTION SENT TO PARTICIPANTS PRIOR TO INTERVIEWS

TEACHERS' SELECTION OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE FOR JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS:
A PERSPECTIVE ON LITERATURE SELECTION AND USE IN THE CLASSROOM

The purpose of my study is to explore how junior high language arts teachers in Alberta are choosing literature for their students' reading in the classroom. I am interested in the criteria they use to select novels and whether they are using any of the recommended books on Alberta Education's 1990 Junior High Novels and Non-Fiction list. I am also interested in teachers' strategies in teaching literature in their classrooms.

I plan to collect data from interviews with teachers in and around Edmonton from a number of different school boards. The audiotaped interviews will be semi-structured using the following predefined questions:

1. Which novels have you taught in your classroom this year?

2. Why did you select these particular books?

3. Did any of the books come from Alberta Education's 1990 recommended reading list for junior high school?

4. Did you use the books for whole class reading, group reading or individual reading?

5. What was your experience teaching the novels?

6. What kind of reading strategies did you use in the classroom?

7. What were students' responses to the books?

Ethical Considerations

I will ensure that participants in this study give fully informed and voluntary consent to be interviewed; they may withdraw from the study at any time. The data obtained from interviews will only be used with participants' consent and pseudonyms will be used in the data presentation to ensure anonymity.

APPENDIX 2.

FICTION TITLES ON ALBERTA EDUCATION’S 1990 JUNIOR HIGH NOVELS LIST

(* - novels mentioned in this study)

GRADE SEVEN:

Animal Stories

Kjelgaard Jim: Wild Trek
Strieber Whitley: Wolf of Shadows *

Historical Fiction

Fox Paula: The Slave Dancer *
Lasky Kathryn: The Night Journey *
Smucker Barbara: Days of Terror *
Sutcliff Rosemary: Dragon Slayer *
Ter Haar Jaap: Boris *
Yolen Jane: Children of the Wolf

Mystery

Duncan Lois: Locked in Time *
Naylor Phyllis Reynolds: Shadows on the Wall

Realistic Fiction

Byars Betsy: Summer of the Swans
Doyle Brian: Angel Square *
Lang Mary-Ellen: Winners *
L’Engle Madeleine: Meet the Austins
Southall Ivan: Ash Road *

Speculative Fiction

Bond Nancy: A String in the Harp
McKenzie Ellen Kindt: Kashka *
Pearce Philippa: Tom’s Midnight Garden *

GRADE EIGHT:

Historical Fiction

Colum Padraic: The Children’s Homer
Haugaard Erik Christian: The Samurai’s Tale
Lunn Janet: Shadow in Hawthorn Bay *
O’Dell Scott: The King’s Fifth *
Speare Elizabeth George: The Witch of Blackbird Pond *
Walsh Jill Paton: The Emperor’s Winding Sheet

Realistic Fiction

Aldridge James & Ringwood Victoria: The True Story of Lilli Stubeck
Craig John: No Word for Goodbye
Levitin Sonia: The Return *
Montgomery Lucy Maude: Anne of Green Gables *
Voigt Cynthia: Homecoming *

Speculative Fiction

Cooper Susan: The Dark is Rising *
Heinlein Robert A.: Tunnel in the Sky
Hughes Monica: The Keeper of the Isis Light *
McCaffrey Anne: Dragonsong
McKinley Robin: Beauty *
Piers Anthony: Crewel Lye: A Caustic Yarn

GRADE NINE:

Historical Fiction

Garfield Leon: Smith *
Hautzig Esther: The Endless Steppe *
Holman Felice: The Wild Children *
Montgomery Rutherford: Iceblink
Park Ruth: Playing Beatie Bow *
Skurzynski Gloria: Manwolf
Speare Elizabeth George: The Bronze Bow
Yep Laurence: Dragonwings

Mystery

Carlton Barbee Oliver: Mystery of the Witches' Bridge *
Doyle Arthur Conan: The Hound of the Baskervilles *
Hillerman Tony: People of Darkness

Realistic Fiction

Cross Gillian: On the Edge *
Fox Paula: The Moonlight Man
Gibbons Kaye: Ellen Foster
Hubert Cam: Dreamspeaker *
LeGuin Ursula: Very Far Away From Anywhere Else *
Paterson Katherine: Jacob have I loved

Speculative Fiction

Asimov Isaac: Foundation
Brooks Terry: Magic kingdom for Sale/Sold *

APPENDIX 3

FICTION TITLES MENTIONED (NOT ON THE 1990 LIST)

(* - novels approved in 1978 curriculum guide)

Alexander Lloyd: Taran Wanderer

Alexander Lloyd: Westmark

Andrews V.C.: Flowers in the Attic

Bronte Charlotte: Jane Eyre

Christie Agatha: And Then There Were None *

Cormier Robert: I am the Cheese

Dickens Charles: David Copperfield

Eddings David: Fantasy Series

George Jean: My Side of the Mountain

George Jean: Julie of the Wolves

Goldman William: The Princess Bride

Golding William: Lord of the Flies

Gordon Sheila: Waiting for the Rain

Halvorson Marilyn: Cowboys Don't Cry

Harris Thomas: The Silence of the Lambs

Hemingway Ernest: The Old Man and the Sea *

Hinton S.E.: The Outsiders

Holm Anne: I am David

Hughes Monica: Hunter in the Dark

Keyes Daniel: Flowers for Algernon

Korman Gordon: The Zucchini Warriors

L'Engle Madeleine: A Wrinkle in Time *

Lipsyte Robert: The Contender *

Little Jean: Mama's Going to Buy you a Mockingbird

Mitchell Margaret: Gone With the Wind

Mowat Farley: Lost in the Barrens *

Mowat Farley: Owls in the Family *

Mowat Farley: The Dog who Wouldn't Be

Nixon Joan L.: Silent Screams

O'Dell Scott: The Island of the Blue Dolphins

Orwell George: Animal Farm

Paperny Myra: Nightmare Mountain

Paterson Katherine: The Great Gilly Hopkins

Pevsner Stella: And You Give Me a Pain, Elaine

Raskin Ellen: The Westing-game

Sebastyen Ouida: Words By Heart

Shaeffer Jack: Shane *

Smucker Barbara: Underground to Canada

Steinbeck John: The Pearl

Stevenson R.L.: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde

Stevenson R.L.: Treasure island

Swarthout Glendon: Bless the Beasts and the Children *

Taylor Theodore: The Cay *

Taylor Mildred: Roll of Thunder, Hear my Cry

Tolkien J.R.R.: The Hobbit

Townsend Sue: The Diary of Adrian Mole

Voigt Cynthia: Dicey's Song

Zindel Paul: The Pigman *

APPENDIX 4

GRADE NINE NOVEL UNIT - SMALL GROUP NOVEL STUDY

by Janet Larocque

THE RESPONSE JOURNAL

The Response Journal is the first part of your assignment for this novel study. All entries must be dated, kept together, and written after every ten pages of your novel. Do not write an entry at the end of a chapter. If you write every ten pages this will work out properly and you will have the correct number of entries.

Each entry should be about a quarter of a page long. Some of your entries will be longer and at other times you may only wish to write a sentence or two. By the time you finish your novel, however, your response journal should be about five pages in length. They should be in a duotang or stapled and prefaced by a title page when handed in for marking.

GUIDELINES FOR ENTRIES:

Your journal entries are NOT chapter summaries. Write about your own thoughts, feelings, reactions and predictions that have occurred to you as you read and discovered the characters and plot of the novel. This writing helps you to clarify your understanding of what you have read and prepares you to better contribute and benefit from your group discussions.

Your entries could begin with one or more of the following statements:

-I predict...
-I noticed that...
-I wonder...
-I don't understand...
-Now I understand...
-What impressed me in this section was...

GROUP DISCUSSION:

The second part of your assignment will be your participation in a discussion and sharing of the thoughts, feelings, reactions, predictions, questions etc. with the others who are reading the same novel. You may not have the same reaction(s) to the novel as others, but your understanding of the novel should grow by carefully considering the point of view of others and accepting or rejecting some of their perceptions.

It will be up to the group to choose a co-ordinator who will keep the group moving through the novel at relatively the same pace and to call the group together for a minimum of

THREE discussions at different stages through the novel.

Evaluation of each individual's contribution will be done by the members of his\her group and, if possible, by teacher observation.

FINAL ASSIGNMENTS:

There will be TWO final assignments to be done on your novel. One will be done by you as an individual. The other will be done by your group.

INDIVIDUAL WRITTEN ASSIGNMENTS:

Choose one of the following alternatives and prepare a well-written, carefully edited composition. Your assignment should be a minimum of two pages in length.

1. Diary of a major character: at least three crucial days are dealt with, as if summarized in a diary.

2. Sequel: tell what happened after the story ended.

3. New ending: resolve the conflict another way. Write another ending.

4. Character study: sketch an important character, describing his/her personality, his/her relationship to others, the part he/she played in the events of the story, and the growth of his/her character through the book.

GROUP ASSIGNMENTS:

Each group must choose one of the following alternatives and prepare a class presentation.

1. Dramatize a key scene, possibly with background music.

2. Debate a controversial issue arising from the novel.

3. Prepare and present an interview of the main characters of the novel by a T.V. interviewer.

4. Your own idea for a group presentation for which you have received teacher approval.

This unit will be marked as follows:
1. THE RESPONSE JOURNAL - 25 MARKS
2. GROUP DISCUSSION - 25 MARKS
3. WRITTEN COMPOSITION - 25 MARKS
4. GROUP PRESENTATION - 25 MARKS

TOTAL.......100 MARKS

APPENDIX 5

GRADE NINE NOVEL UNIT - INDEPENDENT READING

by Janet Larocque.

CHOICE OF NOVEL:

You must choose your novel from one of the following:

1. MAGIC KINGDOM FOR SALE/SOLD by Terry Brooks.
2. THE EYES OF THE DRAGON by Stephen King.
3. A novel from the Junior High Recommended List.
4. A novel approved by me.

Your selection must be finalized by .....

THE RESPONSE JOURNAL:

The Response Journal is the first part of your assignment for this novel study. All entries must be dated, kept together, and written after every twenty-five pages of your novel. Do not write an entry at the end of a chapter, instead try to write somewhere in the middle of a chapter.

Each entry should be about half a page long. Some of your entries will be longer and at other times you may only wish to write a sentence or two. By the time you finish your novel, however, your response journal should be about five pages in length. They should be in a duotang or stapled and prefaced by a title page when handed in for marking.

GUIDELINES FOR ENTRIES:

Your journal entries are NOT chapter summaries. Write about your own thoughts, feeling, reactions and predictions that have occurred to you as you read and discovered the characters and plot of the novel. This writing helps you to clarify your understanding of what you have read.

Your entries could begin with one or more of the following statements:

-I predict...
-I noticed that...
-I wonder...
-I don't understand...
-Now I understand...
-What impressed me in this section was...

FINAL ASSIGNMENT:

Choose one of the following alternatives and prepare a well-written, carefully edited composition. Your assignment should be a minimim of two pages in length.

1. Diary of a major character: at least three crucial days are dealt with, as if summarized in a diary.

2. Sequel: tell what happened after the story ended.

3. New ending: resolve the conflict another way. Write another ending.

4. Character study: sketch an important character, describing his/her personality, his/her relationship to others, the part he/she played in the events of the story, and the growth of his/her character through the book.

THE UNIT WILL BE MARKED AS FOLLOWS:

THE RESPONSE JOURNAL - 50 MARKS
THE WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT - 50 MARKS
TOTAL..............100 MARKS

APPENDIX 6
NOVELS SELECTED BY STUDENTS IN THREE GRADE EIGHT CLASSES FOR INDEPENDENT READING AND BOOK TALKS:

Adler Carole S.: Some Other Summer

Alcott Louisa May: Little Women

Beagle Peter: The Last Unicorn

Bell William: The Cripples Club
Bell William: Crabbe

Bombeck Erma: Family, the Ties that Bind - and Gag

Brooks Terry: The Scions of Shannara
Brooks Terry: The Druid of Shannara

Carter Alden: Sheila's Dying

Christie Agatha: And Then There Were None

Clancy Tom: The Hunt for Red October

Cole Brock: The Goats

Cross Gillian: A Map of Nowhere

Dahl Roald: Tales of the Unexpected

De Felitta Frank: For love of Audrey Rose

Duncan Lois: Killing Mr. Griffin

Forsyth Frederick: The Negotiator

Golding William: Lord of the Flies

Gretzky Wayne: Gretzky: an Autobiography

Guy Rosa: The Friends

Harris Thomas: The Silence of the Lambs

Hemingway Ernest: The Old Man and the Sea

Hinton S.E.: The Outsiders

Hughes Monica: The Dream Catcher

Jacques Brian: Redwall
Jacques Brian: Mossflower

Jordan Robert: The Eye of the World

King Stephen: It

Kinsella W.P.: Shoeless Joe

Korman Gordon: Losing Joe's Place
Korman Gordon: The Zucchini Warriors

Kropp Paul: Dead On
Kropp Paul: Dope Deal

L'Engle Madeleine: A Wrinkle in Time

Little Jean: Little by Little

London Jack: Call of the Wild

Lunn Janet: The Root Cellar

Lyon George Ella: Borrowed Children

Melville Herman: Moby Dick

Montgomery Lucy Maude: The Golden Road
Montgomery Lucy Maude: Emily of New Moon

Nordhoff Charles: Mutiny on the Bounty

Pearson Kit: A Handful of Time

Pike Christopher: Scavenger Hunt

Rawlings Marjorie: Cross Creek

Smucker Barbara: Underground to Canada

Tolkien J.R.R.: Two Towers

Voigt Cynthia: Solitary Blue
Voigt Cynthia: Dicey's Song

Zindel Paul: The Pigman
Zindel Paul: Pardon Me, you're stepping on my eyeball!

APPENDIX 7

DESCRIPTOR FOR EVALUATION OF A GRADE NINE READING WORKSHOP

by Bill Talbot.

10. Loves reading and does so at every opportunity, both in class and at home. Reads a wide variety of literature and attempts challenging books including classic literature. Responds to literature in a variety of ways which demonstrate insight into characters' actions and motives, personal and social issues arising from the novel, and understanding of the author's craft. Responses are articulate and demonstrate superior effort. Superior ability to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books through oral, pictorial and written means.

9. An avid reader who reads a good variety of literature, both in and out of class. Responses are insightful at times. Excellent ability to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books through oral, pictorial and written means.

8. Enjoys reading and reads many books, with some variety. Responses to literature are articulate and demonstrate good effort and comprehension. Competence in responding to literature in a variety of ways is demonstrated. Effectively communicates information, feeling and opinions about books through oral, pictorial and written means.

7. Reads willingly and demonstrates good comprehension in extending responses, although a bit uneven. Moving from detailed summaries to more meaningful ways of responding such as predicting, questioning or discussing characters' actions. Starting to read a wider variety of books. Very good ability to communicate information, feelings or opinions through oral, pictorial and written means.

6. Reads willingly but tends to stick to the same type of books. Responses tend to be detailed summaries of what was read or may also include a general prediction or comment about the book. Good attempt at communicating information, feelings and opinions about books.

5. Reads mostly in class. Responses consist mostly of short summaries of what has been read. Is able to

communicate some information, feelings and opinions about books.

4. Reads, although somewhat unwillingly. Responses tend to be short summaries, which may be somewhat unclear. Some difficulty in communicating information. feelings and opinions about books.

3. Reads unwillingly and is able to provide only a minimal response to literature. Great difficulty in communicating information, feelings and opinions about books or attempts show little effort.

2 Reads only under protest. Unable or unwilling to respond in a meaningful way to literature. Little or no attempt to communicate information, feelings and opinions about books.

1. Does not read or respond to literature.

APPENDIX 8

INDEPENDENT NOVEL READING - HANDOUT TO STUDENTS AT END OF TERM

by Janet Larocque.

NAME:________________________________

How many novels have you read this term?

We have used a lot of class time to read and enjoy novels. Do you think this has had any effect on your reading habits? Are you reading more than usual? Do you read more at home? Are you enjoying reading time? Explain fully.

Set youself one or more reading goals for next term. You might decide to read a certain book, or books, a certain genre (type) of book that you rarely read, or a certain number of books. Explain why you chose this goal.

APPENDIX 9

GRADE EIGHT NOVEL STUDY: MAJOR PROJECT - SCRAPBOOK

by Janet Tripp.

Choose ONE activity from each section (A, B and C) and a fourth from any section you wish.

The scrapbook must contain:

a) An eyecatching title page (include the title of the book, author, your name, etc.)

b) The four activities you have chosen.

This project will be evaluated on creativity, effort, variety, quality of work and neatness.

SECTION A:

1. Create a front page of a newspaper which would include a newspaper article explaining an event in the novel, an illustration of the event and all the other necessary components a newspaper front page should include.
2. As a character from the book, write a letter to another character (from the same book) describing your feelings about an important event which happened in the novel.
3. As a talk-show host, write an interview with one of the characters in the novel which reveals his/her character and personality. This activity should include at least ten questions and detailed responses. (Make appropriate opening and closing comments for the show.)
4. Assume the role of a character in the novel, set ten years in the future and write a journal entry describing your feelings about the events in the story and how it affected your life.
5. Pretend that you have been assigned to write a review of the novel for a prominent weekly newspaper. Use details from the novel to support your opinions in the review.
6. Write a one-act play about one of the important scenes in the novel.

SECTION B:

7. Illustrate one or more of the characters in the novel. You may draw your own picture or locate suitable picture(s) from a magazine. Write the character's (s') name(s) as the title for this page. Include a character sketch with each illustration.

8. Make a collage using pictures of events, people, objects, words and slogans that remind you of the story.

9. Design a book jacket for the novel. Remember to include the title, author and illustrations. You could extend this activity to include the spine of the book; the backcover, summarizing the plot, and the inside flaps, describing the author.

10. Illustrate a scene from the novel. Be colorful and creative.

11. Create a timeline, with illustrations, that outlines the main events of the story.

12. Design a poster for a film of the book.

SECTION C:

13. Collect 3 newpaper articles that relate to the theme of the book. Explain the relationship between the novel and the articles.

14. Draw a plot graph of the novel. Summaries of important events in the novel and illustrations should be placed appropriately on the plot graph.

13. Draw a comic strip of the story's plot, including captions.

16. Write a poem (any form) of at least 10 lines about the plot, a theme, or a character from the novel. The use of calligraphy, fancy designs edging the paper or illustrations will enhance the presentation.

17. Create a ballad based on one of the character's experiences. Can you set it to music: either original or a well-known tune?

18. Create a 3-dimensional picture (similar to a child's "pop-up" book) which illustrates a scene from the book.